WHOLISTIC DISCIPLESHIP:
INTEGRATING THE IDENTITY, ACTIVITY, AND SPIRITUALITY OF JESUS' DISCIPLES

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ABSTRACT

WHOLISTIC DISCIPLESHIP

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This thesis-project project is about developing a wholistic, integrated approach to discipleship at Aletheia Church (Greater Boston, MA). Biblical study and literature reviews shed theological light. Next, the author engages modern perspectives on discipleship in view of tegration and the pervasive desire for spiritual depth therein. Reflecting thereupon, he offers the contours of a wholistic approach, which both takes seriously the concerns of various approaches to discipleship *and* seeks to integrate them with the best of other approaches. Finally, the project at Aletheia Church is described, research reviewed, and conclusions synthesized.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"Why are we here?"

This question hit like a punch. It came up in one of the first classes I ever taught after planting Aletheia Church—the church I now pastor. This inquisitive student probed deeper, "What is the purpose of church, anyway?" *That* question has elicited various and sundry responses throughout the history of the church—to love God, to expand Christendom, to embody the kingdom of God on earth, or even to change the world. But, in my answer to him, I chose the words of Christ, to "make disciples" (Matt. 28:18).

Discipleship has been and continues to be the main framework through which I understand the purpose of the church. Yet, in the decade that has passed between that question and this paper, I have repeatedly discovered that my approach to discipleship, though faithful, was marked by a particular problem: it was far less wholistic than it should have been—a kind of thin obedience. Now, thin obedience is obedience nonetheless, but the concept of discipleship has, for me, gone through various thickenings since then. This thesis-project is itself part of that process.

If it is true that the purpose of the church is to make disciples, then a few obvious questions arise: whither prayer, fasting, and contemplation? What of social justice, concern for the marginalized, or the construction of a biblical jurisprudence? Can discipleship carry the freight of such biblical and such urgent concerns—to transform the human heart and transform society?

In a word, yes.

I believed (and continue to believe) that discipleship—as a concept and as Jesus' marching orders for his Church—can do all this.[1] But, articulating, instantiating, and then experiencing a wholistic vision for discipleship has been fraught with challenges. And without facing those challenges, Christian thought, practice, and experience tends to be disintegrated—parallel, sometimes intersecting, but rarely integrated within the Church and before a watching world.

The Problems of Success

This thesis-project seeks to solve a problem, which oddly enough is a problem related to success. At the time of this writing, I am a "successful" pastor of a "successful" church. At the age of 26, I led a team which planted Aletheia Church between Harvard and MIT. In the decade that has transpired since, we have grown to around 2,000 active participants, three locations, with hundreds of baptisms, dozens of small groups, campus ministries, missions, and a secure financial position. By most external measures, we are successful. However, success and fruitfulness are not always the same thing.[2] In fact, every time we broke through a new barrier, the sentiment of Henri Nouwen would haunt me, "Success brings many rewards and often fame. Fruits, however, come from weakness and vulnerability. And fruits are unique. A child is the fruit conceived in vulnerability, community is the fruit born through shared brokenness, and intimacy is the fruit that grows…"[3] Is ours the fruitfulness that arises out of brokenness? I wondered. And how can deep brokenness bring about fruitfulness? Is there another way to be successful,

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1. Willard notes, "Discipleship to Jesus is the very heart of the gospel." Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1998), 18.

2. Dan Reiland, "Successful or Fruitful?," *The Pneuma Review*, last modified February 5, 2016, accessed November 17, 2020, http://pneumareview.com/successful-or-fruitful/.

3. Henri Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2009), 26.

one that deepens discipleship as it multiplies ministries? For me, answering such questions began by seeing that each moment of success came with part of the church that needed to be repaired; with questions that needed to be answered and problems that needed to be solved.

The first success-related problem is the problem of process. The mission of Aletheia has been the same from its foundation: "To make disciples who bring the truth, grace, and changing power of the gospel for the glory of God and the good of all people." Yet, as our church grew from an organic, small group meeting in my home into an organization of hundreds, and then a more complex organization of thousands with multiple locations, the nature of my leadership and the structure of our church had to change.[4] At various stages of our church's life, my ability to articulate a clear process for discipleship within our church—to faithfully answer the question, "What does a church that really wants to bear the fruit of discipleship *do*?"—had to change. This question of programmed activity—of what to do—made sense to me, and over the years my answer to it has evolved with the size and complexity of our church.

But answers to that question invoke a second question: "When we say 'disciple,' what do we mean? Who are we talking about?" At first, my impulse was to answer this question with more action verbs. "A disciple is someone who does *x* (trusts Christ, evangelizes, repents and believes, etc.)" But this question required a deeper kind of answer, and as our church matured I had to revisit the question of a disciple's identity repeatedly in order to both be faithful to the Scriptures and to those under my pastoral care. Again, various stages of our church's life required me to articulate a theological vision for discipleship—to faithfully answer the question,

4. For a good explanation of these dynamics, see: Timothy Keller, "Leadership and Church Size Dynamics: How Strategy Changes with Growth," *Senior Pastor Central*, accessed November 17, 2020, https://seniorpastorcentral.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Tim-Keller-Size-Dynamics.pdf.

"Who are we as God's people, and who are we becoming?" So, the twin questions of theological identity and church activity needed to be continually refined as Aletheia grew in size and complexity.

In time we were able to address these questions, and having done so, the church experienced more healthy growth. Yet, the intangible question of spiritual substance—of depth—continued to haunt me. I would preach four, packed services, teach classes, and lead groups, but the bigger we became the more necessarily distant from the congregation I became, and the less secure I felt in the answer I would give to the ghost of Nouwen which haunted my conscience. Was I leading a successful disciple-making machine, or were these disciples experiencing real, deep, spiritual life with God and others? Were they prophetically powerful people? Were they eschewing sin and embracing their God? These questions—and many others like it—have repeatedly forced me, across the years of our church's life, to figure out how to figure *that* out—to faithfully answer the question, "What should disciples be experiencing?" And furthermore, "How do we detect, or even curate such experiences?" These questions of lived spirituality have, across the years of my ministry, continually interrupted my pleasant musings on identity and activity. They forced me to my knees in prayer and my study in research simply to try to figure out how to figure *that* out.

Between my prayers and my research, a final question occurred to my mind. If it is the case that a disciple's activity, identity, and spirituality are essential to Great Commission and Great Commandment faithfulness, how can a church like mine bring them together? How can we foster wholistic discipleship? It is this challenging question which this thesis-project attempts to answer by reflecting on my experience planting and leading Aletheia Church and interacting with

pastoral and theological leaders within the broadly evangelical tradition of the previous few generations.

Figuring Out What to Do

I am an evangelical, working and living in that stream. This tradition is fundamentally activistic[5] and mission driven.[6] So, it's hardly surprising that the previous decades have seen a *lot* of literature, programs, and prescriptions to make disciples.[7] So when it came to the answering the first question—"What does a church that really wants to bear the fruit of discipleship *do*?"—there was no lack of conversation partners. Evangelical leaders have often pointed out that discipleship is the critically important key to renewal.[8] But, how could one organize a church such that its activities would produce disciples? This question of activity has been directly addressed by most evangelical resources on discipleship,[9] and this thesis-project will converse with many of these resources as helpful interlocutors in the development of the wholistic vision for discipleship here propounded. Yet, one need not be a megachurch pastor to see a potential

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5. David W Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*, (London, UK: Routledge, 1993), 3.

6. Garth M. Rosell, *The Surprising Work of God: Harold John Ockenga, Billy Graham, and the Rebirth of Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 26-27, 28.

7. An extensive biography of such literature can be found as course bibliographies to seminary classes (For example, Dr. Jim Singleton's course at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. See <https://archive.gordonconwell.edu/hamilton/current/documents/hamreg-SP19-EV701-HA.pdf> accessed July 20, 2020.), and home discipleship (See Christopher K. Lensch, "Annotated Bibliography on Christian Disciplines in the Home and Church," *WRS Journal 9/2* (August 2002), 28-29.

8. Richard Lovelace makes the point that renewal depends on the deep, spiritual formation of the local congregation (chapter 6) *and* an orientation toward mission (chapter 5).; Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1979). See also Mike Breen, *Building a Discipleship Culture* (Anderson, SC: 3DM, 2016).

9. The assertion will be defended in chapter 3.

liability in over-emphasizing the activity of discipleship. For, if discipleship is only the domain of the action-oriented, then it shall forever elude the more contemplative or the more cognitive.[10]

Finding Out Who We Are

In my case, developing a theological vision of Christian identity and programming church-wide activity went almost hand in hand. Indeed, I am not the first person to connect identity and discipleship. A deep concern to place identity at the fountainhead of discipleship is common to Roman Catholics,[11] Lutherans,[12] Anglicans,[13] and even Reformed Christians.[14] Catholics understand that to be Roman Catholic *is* to have one's identity settled as a disciple of Jesus,[15] which is not altogether unlike the other traditions, exchanging the word, "Catholic," for

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10. "[The Church Growth Movement's] overemphasis on technique and results can put too much pressure on ministers because it underemphasizes the importance of godly character and the sovereignty of God… "by and large, I found the books less helpful than I hoped they would be. Implicitly or explicitly, they made near-absolutes out of techniques and models that had worked in a certain place at a certain time." Timothy Keller, *Center Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 14, 15.

11. Bishop Donald J. Hying notes in his article, "Discipleship: Our Fundamental Catholic Identity," that "Through the saving activity of Jesus' Incarnation, life, death and resurrection, we become adopted children of the Father, brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, temples of the Holy Spirit, all in the mystery, communion and sacrament of the Church."; "Discipleship: Our Fundamental Catholic Identity", last modified January 2014, https://www.archmil.org/Synod-2014/District-Gatherings/bckgrnd/Intro-Discipleship-Bishop-Hying.pdf. Though, it should be stated that Catholics do not ignore the actions of making disciples, only that for them such actions largely flow from their understanding of Catholic identity. See Sherry A. Weddell, *Fruitful Discipleship* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2017).

12. Lutheran theologians almost universally explain discipleship in terms of one's repentance and faith, positional righteousness, and membership by that faith in the body of Christ, the Church. See Robert Kolb, "Discipleship in the Lutheran Tradition", last modified March 26, 2012, https://concordiatheology.org/2012/03/discipleship-in-the-lutheran-tradition/.

13. Anglicans have not historically used the phrase "discipleship" or "disciple" to refer to Christian identity, but recently the Archbishop Justin Welby has stated, "The most important decision any person can ever make is to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. It's the best thing anyone can do," suggesting that the becoming of a disciple is fundamentally about a change/modification in one's identity.; "What We Believe | The Church of England", accessed July 23, 2020, https://www.churchofengland.org/our-faith/what-we-believe.

14. WCF doesn't specifically mention discipleship, evangelism, or missions at all. Though a few study guides that have been published to accompany WCF do briefly mention activity, but the focus still heavily remains on identity. See Joseph A. Pipa Jr., The Westminster Confession of Faith Study Book: A Study Guide for Churches (Fearn, Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2005).

15. *Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2nd ed.* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), 324, 333.

their preferred monikers, of course. Many who have given great attention to developing a theological vision around a disciple's identity would likely agree that it precedes and enables any faithful activity[16] or spiritual experience.[17] There is plenty to agree with in such writers, as forming a deep, biblical, and rich understanding of oneself, God, and the Church is essential for knowing how to act rightly.[18] Yet, if theological identity is the favored emphasis of any discipleship vision it may not be long before words like "stale," or "stagnant" become adjectives *du jour* of that particular ministry[19]—a liability I've experienced in my own ministry journey.

Desperate for Holy Spirituality

"The scary thing about church growth tactics is that they work!"[20] That was the sentiment of a mega-church pastor turned denominational leader, and my journey has borne out its truthfulness. Of course, any Christian understands that God is behind any good fruit we bear, but as previously mentioned, sometimes what appears to be fruit turns out later only to have been worldly success.[21] It is this third category—sometimes described with the language of

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16. Keller agrees saying, "Christian discipleship [in evangelical churches] is interpreted as consisting largely of activities done in the evening or on the weekend." Keller, *Center Church,* 341.

17. Richard Lints, for example, seems to suggest that one's doctrinal foundation is the starting point for everything. Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 83.

18. "Christianity is not instinctive to anyone, nor is it picked up casually without effort. It is a faith that has to be learned, and therefore taught, and so some sort of systematic instruction (catechumenate) is an essential part of a church's life."; J. I. Packer, *Growing in Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), xii.

19 "a lack of such Christian involvement is a sure recipe for boredom and dryness in theological studies…" David Wenham, "Editorial: The Relevance of Theological Education," *Themelios* 8, no. 2 (1983): 3.

20. Interview with Matt Chandler, *Resurgence Conference,* 2009.

21. "Ever since the Great Awakening, evangelicals have been known for their effective use of emerging media. Evangelical magazines in American and Great Britain proliferated in the mid-nineteenth century. Today, self-promotion by so-called revivalists hardly strikes evangelicals as incongruous, so comfortable have we become with the circus of publicity. Discernment takes second billing to "fruitfulness," measured just as the world does—in numbers…"; Collin Hansen, "Revival Defined and Defended: How the New Lights Tried and Failed to Use America's First Religious Periodical to Quiet Critics and Quell Radicals," *Themelios* 39, no. 1 (2014): 36.

psychology,[22] emotional health,[23] or spiritual vitality—which most accurately characterizes the haunting words of Nouwen I mentioned earlier, and which I will describe here as "spirituality." One can find a similar concern for spirituality in the traditions of Asceticism,[24] Mysticism,[25] Pietism,[26] Holiness,[27] and the Modern Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement.[28] As my church grew, multiplied, and matured, a greater longing for the depth, color, and the effervescence of the Holy Spirit's presence grew in me and in my people. And as you might imagine, I am not the first pastor to recognize this, either. Most of the authors from whom I have drawn wisdom were interested in more than merely numbers and even theology. Yet frustratingly, a great

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22. The reception of psychology amongst Christians has been varied, but one major critique of this growing discipline is that is has the potential to focus a disciple far too much on the experience of his inner life. This debate is helpfully elucidated in Eric L. Johnson, ed. *Psychology and Christianity: Five Views. 2nd ed*. (Downers Grove: IVP, 2010).

23. E.g, Peter Scazerro, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: It's Impossible to Be Spiritually Mature, While Remaining Emotionally Immature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017).

24. The original, ancient Ascetics were defined by their self-abnegation and departure from the norms of Christian identity, and were therefore interested to experience discipleship as a kind of athleticism. "Asceticism is not easily defined because of its diverse manifestations, but in general it involves self-deprivation and is usually pursued out of a desire to glorify God by avoiding what is harmful and by limiting oneself to what is necessary to maintain life."; E. F. Harrison, "Asceticism," ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised* (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988), 313.

25. I understand *Mysticism* to refer to the experience of "spiritual mysteries, or a higher consecration to spiritual realities, or a union with deity, by a withdrawal from the external world and by means of contemplation."; Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Belfast; Greenville, SC: Ambassador Emerald International, 2002), 293. The tradition of Christian Mysticism is far too extensive to adequately deal with here, and its reception within Evangelicalism has been controversial. Carl Trueman makes a convincing case for reading the mystics in "Minority Report: Why Should Thoughtful Evangelicals Read the Medieval Mystics?," *Themelios* 33, no. 1 (2008): 2.

26. Interestingly, the effect of Spener's and Franke's cheerful but serious pursuit of vital godliness as an experienced reality eventually led this movement to, under von Zinzendorf, move toward the actions of disciple-making in their radical commitment to world missions that came to mark the Moravian movement. However, it must be noted that this began not as an identity-based, confessional movement, but rather in reaction to Lutheranism as such. "Zinzendorf's character, like most, had its light and its shadow. He was inclined to a sentimental type of religion."; Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic), 343.

27. The Holiness Tradition (vis. Wesley, Finney, et. al.) understood the spirituality of Christian discipleship to entail Total Sanctification, the belief that one may, by the power of the Spirit, rigorously experience such a level of personal holiness that one may be considered to have obtained a kind of perfection.

28. Highly experiential, much of what this movement sought to renew in the church was precisely that… experience, particularly of the gifts of the Spirit. It has been the understanding of those in the MPCM that discipleship is the experience the Spiritual power the disciples themselves experienced, "to expect the power and dynamism of the Spirit in their lives and ministries."; Eddie L Hyatt. *2000 Years Of Charismatic Christianity: A 21st century look at church history from a Pentecostal/charismatic prospective* (Kindle Location 123).

programmatic approach to church activity, even if it is accompanied by a rich theology, will not automatically produce disciples with a vibrant, lived spirituality. Yet, without this, discipleship cannot happen, and fruit cannot be borne.

However, this third layer—the spirituality gap—has caused various reactions. Upon seeing it, some successful megachurch pastors simply transition to a completely different kind of ministry.[29] Others admitting that spiritual formation is complex and almost impossible to measure,[30] hope that God will sovereignly overcome the gap amidst the hustle and bustle, the theology and study. A third group insists that spiritual depth is impossible in a large church.[31] Yet, perhaps idealistically, I am not ready to embrace any of these conclusions. I am, and my church is, transfixed by the possibility of a wholistic discipleship that somehow integrates activity, identity, and spirituality.

Wholistic Integration

Once again, I am not the first to desire such integration. In fact, one may make a strong argument that pretty much every evangelical leader wants that—real disciples who do the right things, believe the right things, and experience the right things. The question is how to bring that about. In an effort to do so, this thesis-project will converse with leaders from the

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29. This was the experience of Francis Chan, for example. Sam Hailes, "Francis Chan: Why I Quit My Megachurch and Started Again," *Premier Christianity*, last modified March 23, 2020, accessed November 18, 2020, https://www.premierchristianity.com/Past-Issues/2019/February-2019/Francis-Chan-Why-I-quit-my-megachurch-and-started-again.

30. Dan Reiland, "Spiritual Formation in the Megachurch," *Dan Reiland*, last modified March 21, 2019, accessed November 18, 2020, https://danreiland.com/spiritual-formation-mega-church/.

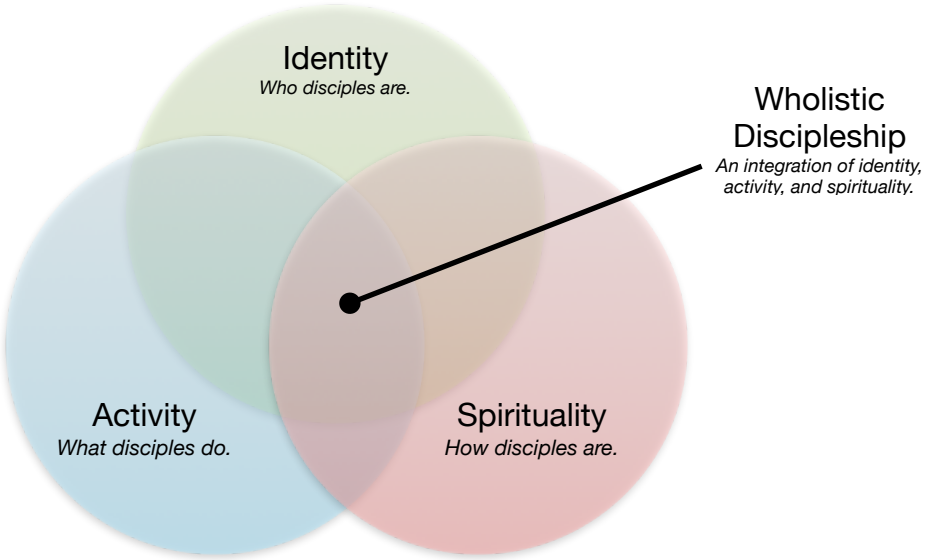
31. "I've been a pastor, and I don't think you can [maintain attention on Jesus] in mass things. One of the most detrimental things in the Christian church is the mega-church—it just sweeps you off your feet and leaves you with nothing. From my point of view, I've always insisted on being part of a smaller church. I don't think you can do this big… [It's] nearly impossible."; Rick Skip and Eugene Peterson, "Q&A: Eugene Peterson on Jesus, Ego and Sabbath," *YouthMinistry.com*, last modified June 28, 2018, accessed November 18, 2020, https://youthministry.com/qa-eugene-peterson-jesus-ego-sabbath/.

Church-Growth Movement and its ideological offspring, arguing that most of what they have to say seems most helpful in the programmatic, activity dimension. Then, it will engage those authors—mostly from the Reformed tradition—whose perspective on discipleship prioritizes theological identity as the appropriate starting place. It will also interact with those leaders who advocate the virtue of deep spirituality as the most authentic furnace for discipleship. Throughout this engagement, attention will be given to ways in which they—to greater or lesser degrees—contribute to the wholistic, integrative approach of this thesis-project. This literary overview will then be followed by an account of how this wholistic project has worked at Aletheia, and how it might be implemented elsewhere. The final chapter will reflect on what was been learned, identifying helpful insights, while admitting the foggy, unresolved dimensions of this project that have yet to fully develop.

Defining Discipleship

It should be obvious that the goal is not to toss out the important and historically conditioned insights of the past, staking out the better territory of truth. Rather, it is to converse —sometimes critically—with other thinkers and leaders, applying their insights to the goal of faithfulness to The Great Commission and The Great Commandment. The three perspectives—activity, identity, and spirituality—will form the foundation of this thesis-project, with the goal of integrating them into a wholistic understanding of discipleship as something new yet rather old; to put forth discipleship as the mission of the church, the meaning of the Christian life, and the method of transformation to all who heed its call. The scheme, therefore, lies not in differentiating these three perspectives, but in integrating them.

Fig. 1: Wholistic Discipleship Venn Diagram



As the above graphic suggests, this thesis-project project takes for granted that these perspectives alone are not capable of forming the individual who pursues them after the image of Christ. But, taken together, the wholistic vision to which they give shape maps out a more faithful, more fruitful path for Aletheia church… and perhaps, others, as well.

Before proceeding any further, however, we must address a tension within the literature about discipleship that centers fundamentally around the question, is discipleship about one's relationship with God, or does it include one's actions in the world. Is its orientation God-ward or world-ward? Some authors seem to suggest that discipleship refers exclusively or fundamentally to the process by which Christians become more like Jesus, follow him with increasing faithfulness and obedience—what we shall call the Godward view.[32] It declares, "Discipleship is the process by which God forms us into the image of Jesus,"[33] a view taken by Dr. Tim Keller in his book *Center Church:*

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32. "The state of following Jesus Christ, and serving and obeying him. The NT stresses the privileges, joys and cost of this calling." - Martin H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies,* (London: Martin Manser, 2009).

33. Richard Church, "What Makes a Disciple," *Reform Magazine*, October 2017.

> Churches must first seek to connect people to God through evangelism and worship. **Second, an integrated church will work to connect people to one another through community and discipleship**. The church should also seek ways of connecting people to the needs of the city through mercy and justice ministries. Finally, churches must help connect people to the culture through the integration of faith and work."[34] (Emphasis Mine)

In fact, most modern Christian resources on discipleship seem to focus on helping current Christians become better Christians,[35] giving rise to several helpful resources for a modern-day rabbi/student relationship to achieve the goal of forming more faithful Christians.[36] A visual representation of this view might look like this:

Figure 2: Discipleship Contrasted

World-ward	God-ward
Missions	Maturity
Outreach	Sanctification

Unfortunately, this God-ward view tends to separate what Jesus has joined together.[37] Taking his cues from Mark 1:16-18, Dr. Steve Murrell describes discipleship simply as (1) following Jesus, (2) fishing for men, in the context of (3) spiritual family.[38] This would also be

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34. Timothy Keller, *Center Church,* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012) 838.

35. A survey of the literature and resources available at LifeWay.com, reveled that most recently published material categorized under "discipleship" has very little to do with evangelism. See <http://www.lifeway.com/n/Bible-Study/Discipleship-Groups> accessed December 5, 2019.

36. "Discipleship is the process of devoting oneself to a teacher to learn from and become more like them."; Chris Byrley, "Discipleship," ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook, Lexham Bible Reference Series* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014). See also Philip Nation, "Defining Discipleship," BibleStudyTools.com, , accessed December 5, 2017, https://www.biblestudytools.com/blogs/philip-nation/defining-discipleship.html.

37. Dallas Willard expressed open frustration with the separation of evangelism from discipleship because it inadvertently warps both. "If we have an intentional program to make disciples, can we simultaneously intend to make 'converts' or 'members' who are *not* disciples? Can we leave the latter to believe that they need to become disciples, and that this actually the heart of the message of 'grace'? … Do we have any idea of what discipleship evangelism, as we might call it, would look like?" Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1998), 435.

38. Steve Murrell, *WikiChurch* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma, 2011), 61-63.

the view of Darrel Bock who states, "Discipleship could be defined as becoming and being a flourishing follower of Jesus who embodies the character of Christ by engaging in a lifelong, personal pursuit of wholistic transformation and doing so within a like-minded community of faith that's corporately committed to being and making other disciples."[39]

The above definition which integrates what some have divided will be the view taken here, that discipleship is fundamentally incapable of separating a Godward orientation from a world-ward one. In the mind of Jesus, discipleship seems to have included conversion, as he commanded his disciples to go and make disciples (Matthew 28:18-19). Presumably, that included preaching the gospel to the unbelieving, as there were no other Christians yet—a stunningly world-ward focus. Yet, Jesus did not have mere converts in view, but "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you," with the assurance that the experience of his presence would be truly with them, forever.

So then, if discipleship is fundamentally God-ward *and* world-ward in its orientation, and about identity, activity, and spirituality, how then might we define this word? I propose the following:

- A disciple is one whose identity, activity, and spirituality have been and are being re-integrated before God and the world, by faith in the gospel.
- Discipleship is the process of this reintegration.

A disciple is a human, fully alive and integrated in his identity, activity, and spirituality, living in communion with the Trinity *and* oriented toward the world, rightly. Therefore, discipleship is the process by which all of this becomes, and in the end, is actual.

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39. Darrell L. Bock et al., *NT176 The Gospel Message in the Early Church*, Logos Mobile Education (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

The Nature of the Project

I fully recognize that I am making a rather large claim. To freight the concept of discipleship with the whole of Christian life and practice is somewhat innovative, if precariously so. However, the experience of my own ministry, subject to the process outlined in this thesis, has convinced me that of all the ways I have encountered to imagine a practical ecclesiology and vision of the Christian life, no other comes close in holding the tensions of simplicity and profundity, practicality and profundity, humility and enthusiasm, study and Spirituality. So, with such conviction in mind, this thesis-project will outline the process by which Aletheia formed its own wholistic vision of discipleship (and how another church may, too) through three phases:

- Reframe - Mapping onto the "Identity" sphere, this phase guides one to assess and expand ones understanding of discipleship.
- Re-imagine - Mapping onto the "Activity" sphere, this phase guides one to think through the actions and ministries of the church along the lines of the newly framed vision for discipleship.
- Renew - Mapping onto the "Spirituality" sphere, this final phase guides one to experience reality renewed by the first two phases.

Measuring the fruitfulness of such a proposal is important. A church may ask itself, "is anyone, as a result of our practice, becoming a follower of Jesus who was not yet one?" To answer this question, one could count baptisms, those enrolled in new believers' classes, or perhaps measure a more revivalistic "decisions for Christ." After conversion, measuring sanctification is likewise critical, and could be discovered by asking questions like, "How many new disciples are making it into small groups, and then becoming leaders?" The point here is not

yet to define what is measured, only to say that discovering if a discipleship process is fruitful means that such things *must* be measured, both qualitatively and quantitatively.[40] We will return to that topic later in this thesis-project.

With the problem outlined, the perspectives clarified, and the project proposed, attention shall now turn to the Scriptures to ask the most important question of all: does any of this map onto the witness of Scripture?

40. Samuel Lee makes an in-depth case for the need to critically assess our current methods of church planting and disciple-making. While his research is focused on the different kinds of entrepreneurial church planting methods, his whole underlying premise is that measurement is critical. See Samuel Lee, "Can We Measure the Success and Effectiveness of Entrepreneurial Church Planting?" *Evangelical Review of Theology 40*, no. 4 (October 2016).

CHAPTER 2

A BRIEF, BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF DISCIPLESHIP

Introduction

This thesis-project is promulgating the definition of a disciple as a human, fully alive[41] and integrated in his identity, activity, and spirituality, living in communion with the Trinity, and oriented toward the world rightly. Therefore, discipleship is the process by which all of this become possible, and in the end, actual. In this chapter, I shall offer biblical justification for such an admittedly large definition.

While simpler definitions of discipleship exist,[42] few capture the wholistic vision for discipleship that I believe the Scriptures support. So, a justification for my own definition shall proceed by means of a brief, biblical theology of discipleship, beginning with the Old Testament, then traveling into the New, interacting with various scholars along the way. In so doing I shall not only demonstrate that discipleship is an important theme in the Scriptures themselves, but also that the definition underpinning this thesis-project is biblically justified, supporting the assertion that a wholistic, integrated approach to discipleship provides a robust means for internal transformation *and* external renovation.

Adam, the First Disciple

Searching the Old Testament for followers of Jesus is obviously anachronistic. However, searching for learners and followers of Yahweh is not. Broadening our definition in

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41. "The glory God is man fully alive." Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 4.20.7

42. Definitions of discipleship are legion. See Martin H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (London: Martin Manser, 2009).; Gerald R. McDermott and Dallas Willard, "Discipleship," in *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

this manner, we find the first disciple was not called on the shores of Galilee but created from the dirt of Eden. Adam, the first man, was created by Yahweh (Gen. 1:27, 2:7) to follow the ways given him by Yahweh,[43] learn the word of Yahweh,[44] and create more followers of Yahweh[45] as part of Yahweh's great purpose in creation—to image himself through his imagers.[46] In his recuperation of what was lost in Adam,[47] others have mapped Christ's calling and instruction of his first disciples upon the creation and calling of Adam.[48] Discipleship, therefore, is not a New Testament innovation, but a gracious recuperation and continuation of humanity's divine purpose as followers and imitators of Yahweh.[49] As a kind of "disciple 1.0," Adam was given divine instructions to follow (2:15-17), the first family to steward (2:18-24), a divine mission to

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43 Adam was created and given God-like functions to image God into the new world. The *imago dei* wasn't merely his status, but entangled with his divine vocation as an "imager." See Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015) 39-44.; K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26, vol. 1A, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 208–210.

44. When God spoke to Adam in Genesis 2:16-17, Adam became a kind of learner. "The verb "commanded" (v. 16) occurs twenty-five times in Genesis, but this first occurrence is the only place in Genesis where the narrative introduces a divine command," K. A. Mathews, *Genesis,* 210.

45. The command to "be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth," (Gen 1:26-28) certainly involved more than mere procreation, but not less. This expansive impulse in the creation mandate is explored in G. K. Beale. *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), KL 8697.

46. "We are created to image God, to be his imagers. It is what we are by definition. The image is not an ability we have, but a status. We are God's representatives on earth. To be human is to image God. This is why Genesis 1:26–27 is followed by what theologians call the "dominion mandate" in verse 28. The verse informs us that God intends us to be him on this planet. We are to create more imagers ("be fruitful and multiply … fill") in order to oversee the earth by stewarding its resources and harnessing them for the benefit of all human imagers ("subdue … rule over")."; Heiser, *Unseen*, 42-43.

47. Adamic christology has a long heritage, all of which lends itself to understanding the work of Jesus as recuperating what was lost in Adam, starting with Paul in Romans 5:12-21. This is a Christological theme that many able theologians have expended upon, but a few connect Adamic Chirstology with discipleship. See: Pannenberg notes this connection to the role of the church: Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, vol. 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991–1998), 49-50.

48. See Robert H. Gundry, "Pastoral Pensées: The Hopelessness of the Unevangelized," *Themelios* 36, no. 1 (2011): 50.

49. Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 385.

accomplish (1:28), and a spectacular level of freedom with which to carry his imaging forward (1:18-20)[50]—each of which are aspects of the definition of discipleship that shall be promulgated here. Further, it should be noted that for the first human(s), identity, activity, and spirituality were fully integrated, both before God and their new world. Declared to be made in the image of God (1:27) and very good (1:30), Adam's identity was secure.[51] Given instructions on *how* to image God through his work as a prophetic priest-king (1:28, 2:15), his activity was integrated.[52] And, living in God's garden-sanctuary,[53] enjoying a shameless relationship with his wife, and the unveiled presence of God (3:8), his spiritual life was integrated with his identity and activity. Thus, it is not unreasonable to consider Adam as a kind of original disciple, which gives conceptual gravitas to the idea beyond simple church growth or personalized spirituality.

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50. As God's original human family, "Adam and Eve were created for the purpose of extending God's rule over the created order, so that his divine presence would radiate out from them. God rules over the cosmos in the invisible heavens with the angels, and the first couple is charged with appropriating that rule on earth."; Benjamin L. Gladd, *From Adam and Israel to the Church: Essential Studies in Biblical Theology* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP, 2020), 14.

51. Much more can be said about what it means to bear the divine image, but cannot be further expounded here. See John Frame, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: P&R, 2018) 784-785.; J. J. Stamm, 'Die Imago-Lehre von Karl Barth und die alttestamentlìche Wissenschaft', in *Antwort. Festschrift K. Barth, ed. E. Wolf et al., Evangelischer Verlag* (Zollikon-Zürich, 1956) 84-98, though, they add a fourth category.; Bruce A. Ware, "Male and Female Complementarity and the Image of God," in *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood,* ed. Wayne Grudem, Foundations for the Family Series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002). For a history interpretation/ categorization see: D. J. A. Clines. "The Image of God in Man." *Tyndale Bulletin 19* (1968): 53–103.; G. L. Bray. "The Significance of God's Image in Man." *Tyndale Bulletin 42, no. 2* (1991): 195–225.

52. "Fundamentally, being created in God's image means that Adam and Eve represent him on the earth… the divine imprint of God in humanity that reflects his divine attributes and functions in the threefold office of king, priest, and prophet." Gladd, 12.; Frame links *imago dei* to *munus triplex* by drawing "parallels between the three lordship attributes and the three anointed offices of Scripture: king, prophet, and priest. God, particularly Christ the Anointed One, is the original bearer of these offices. Man bears analogous offices in relation to the lower creation…" John Frame, *Systematic Theology* (P&R: Philadelphia, PA, 2013), 786.

53. G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2011) KL 1343. This analogy is so commonplace that The Bible Project, a web-based series of animations for biblical literacy, employs this as a controlling metaphor for understanding Eden. See Tim Mackie, "Temple: BibleProject™," BibleProject, accessed November 30, 2020, https://bibleproject.com/explore/temple/. See also Morales, 51-53.; Lifsa Block Schachter, "The Garden of Eden as God's First Sanctuary." *Jewish Bible Quarterly 41, no. 2* (April 2013): 73–77. http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0001939006&site=ehost-live.; Gordon J. Wenham,"Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story." In Proc, 9th World Congress of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, Aug 1985: Div A - Period of the Bible, 19–25. Jerusalem. http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0001153378&site=ehost-live.

Discipleship was the work of *imaging* for the first humans. As we will see, it becomes the work of new-creation and restoration for renewed humanity.

Sin as Disintegration

If the first humans enjoyed a fully integrated experience of life, then sin can be properly understood as the introduction of *dis*integration—the coming apart of human identity, activity, and spirituality. Sin decimated humanity's self-understanding (identity), vocation (activity), and lived experience within the world (spirituality).[54] In fact, such disintegration provides a helpful heuristic by which a doctrine of sin can be made more robust.[55]

When the serpent tempted Eve, he made a tactical decision to challenge her to eat from the Tree of Knowledge (3:1). It has often been rightly noted that the serpent was attacking God's word.[56] But, he also focused on her actions—"Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat…'" (3:1). By sinning in her activity, Eve undermined her identity as a free ruler in God's world, unwittingly severing the connection between her actions and identity[57] *and* between her life in

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54. While this particular definition of disintegration is original to this thesis-project, many theologians have understood sin as a disintegration. See R. W. Yarbrough, "Forgiveness and Reconciliation," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology,* ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 503.; Oswald Chambers, *Biblical Ethics* (Hants UK: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1947).; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation, Part 3.1, vol. 4* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 461.

55. Gladd sees disunity and disharmony as a result of sin.; Gladd, 78.; Frame applies his trademark triperspectivilism to suggest sin as a disintegration of motive, standards, and goals.; Frame, *ST*, 849.

56. "The serpent first questions God's prohibition: 'Did he say that?' (cf. Gen. 3:1)… Because God's word is an expression of his generous character, the questioning of God's word involves a questioning of his character." Scott R. Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading: A Theological Introduction to the Bible and Its Interpretation* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 21.; This was a specific assault on Adam and Eve's prophetic function, to live according to God's words. See Gladd, *From Adam,* 23-24.; Frame, *ST,* 852.

57. "[T]heir sin gave a different answer to the question, 'Who am I?'" Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994) 493.; "Alienated from God, we live in the misery of separation from God, far away from the home of our own identity." Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, vol. 2* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991–1998), 179.

the world and before God.[58] In his collusion with sin, Adam brought about the curses Yahweh pronounced on him, his wife, and their progeny (Gen 3:14-19).

God began his curses precisely where sin entered—with human activity. Eve would now experience her vocation (activity) as pain, even though she was called in Genesis 3:20 to be the "mother of all the living" (identity). Similarly, Adam would experience his vocation (activity) as conflict, even though he was called to be the one who would faithfully guard and keep the garden, his wife, and his world (identity). As if these devastating circumstances were not bad enough, they would additionally experience reality no longer as an integrated whole, where life before God and within the world would be one, but as forever severed now that they were cursed to leave God's presence (3:24). And this whole judgement scene was experienced in the terrifying presence of God's glorious, judicial Spirit[59]—the very presence from which they were sent,[60] leaving them with the final effect of their fall: the total disintegration of activity and identity *and* spirituality.

Only by seeing the disastrous and disintegrating effects of sin can the program of discipleship be fully appreciated as a wholistic, re-integrating endeavor. It is the process by

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58. "[We] belong both to God and to the people, but then all of the people of God belong to and are accountable to God for their behavior. Everything is to be done *coram Deo*, before the face of God, not merely bearing in mind that God is watching, but bearing in mind that God is now working." Ben Witherington III, *Work: A Kingdom Perspective on Labor* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 89.

59. "The role of the Spirit as divine witness (a judicial, courtroom role) is central to this story… On the heels of having transgressed the covenant, the royal couple take flight—not from a gentle breeze, but from the Spirit of judgement." Michael Horton, *Rediscovering the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017) 151.; "'They heard the voice (qôl) of Yahweh God' (Gen. 3:8a). It is generally agreed that the 'voice' here is not that of the Lord's speaking, as though he was heard conversing or calling. It is rather the "voice," or sound, of the Lord's coming that was heard…. This passage must be played fortissimo. What Adam and Eve heard was frighteningly loud. It was the shattering thunder of God's advent in judgment." Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), 98.

60. "The garden of Eden is a special place of God's presence that foreshadows the later tabernacle and temple… Cherubim also guard the garden when Adam and Eve are expelled…. Disobedience leads to a disruption of fellowship with God." Richard Belcher, *Prophet, Priest, and King: The Roles of Christ in the Bible and Our Roles Today* (Philadelphia, PA: P&R, 2019), 8-9, 11.

which a human becomes fully alive, re-integrated in his identity, activity, and spirituality, living in communion with the Trinity and re-oriented toward the world, rightly. Understanding the devastating and multivalent problems of sin may help guard the concept of discipleship from shrinking to one or two of the three, wholistic parts.

Abraham as Yahweh's Disciple

Yahweh's determination to renew the world and his people brings us to the call of Abram—a motif that would be later echoed by Jesus' calling of his first disciples.[61] Leaving his land and his father's household (Genesis 12:1), Abram set in motion a typological response for the people of Israel—one of calling, of family, of mission, and of empowerment to accomplish that mission. For Abraham, his calling to follow Yahweh was connected to the promise of an inheritance (family and land). Just as Yahweh began the human project through a family, he would redeem it through a family.

But Abram's new family would not merely be his to enjoy, but to equip with the covenantal ways and words of Yahweh (Genesis 17:9-14).[62] Like the disciples who would later be called by Christ, Abraham was God's friend,[63] called not only into relationship with God

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61. Wilkins, *Following the Master,* 64.

62. God's calling of Abram involved the promise of a family that would impact the nations precisely through their special, covenantal relationship. Thus, Abraham's "discipleship" relationship cannot be reverse-engineered through an understanding of the term in purely Hellenistic context, but by reading the Old Testament covenants *into* the Hellenistic contexts. See Wilkins, *Following the Master,* 69.

63. Note the parallels between 2 Chron. 20:7, Is. 41:8, and John 15:14-15. "Abraham is the only person in the Old Testament to receive the title "friend of God" … This is the astonishing message of the New Testament. The relationship that Abraham had with God in the Old Testament is now opened up to you and me." Iain M. Duguid, "Living in the Gap between Promise and Reality: The Gospel according to Abraham," ed. Tremper Longman III and J. Alan Groves, *The Gospel according to the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1999), 85–86.

himself, but to be a messenger of God's ways.[64] "For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice," (Genesis 18:19). These words—*righteousness* (צְדָקָה) and *justice* (וּמִשְׁפָּט) —would form the center of all the demands of covenant relationship with Yahweh.[65] As a follower of Yahweh's call, Abraham was to embody that message in word and deed before his covenant offspring, and through them, to the nations.

The calling of Abraham adds nuance to our understanding of a disciple's identity. His call to follow God (Gen. 12:1) came with a promise of family (12:2, 12:7, 15:4-6, 17:4-8, etc.). All this was in order that the nations might be blessed (12:1-2), and that somehow the world would be filled with these promised descendants (15:5), which according to later apostolic testimony would include the Gentile disciples of Jesus. Further, it was Abraham's response of believing obedience, attributed to him as righteousness (Gen. 15:6), that fundamentally changed the nature of his identity, his spiritual life, and his actions, as God's chosen instrument for his redemptive purposes. No wonder Paul used Abraham as a model for Christian faith and discipleship.

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64. "Abraham is called a prophet in Genesis 20, which is the first time that the word for prophet (*navi*) is used in Scripture…. God's interaction with Abraham in Genesis 18 portrays Abraham as an intercessory prophet as he pleads for God to withhold judgment because of the number of righteous within the city. God's deliberation concerning whether to include Abraham reminds one of the divine council (Job 1:6; Ps. 89:7) and being brought into the prophetic circle (1 Kings 22:14–28; Amos 3:7).3 The aspect of prayer in connection with being a prophet is specifically mentioned in Genesis 20. In fact, Abraham's intercession can save Abimelech because Abraham is a prophet, which assumes a close relationship with God (as demonstrated in ch. 18)." Belcher, *PPK,* 2-3.

65. Michael F. Bird, "Righteousness," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

Moses, a Reluctant Disciple

The character of Moses looms large in Israel's foundation as the Bible's first redeemer and rescuer (Acts 7:35).[66] Here we shall see that he was a disciple *and* deliverer. In fact, he could not have been the latter without becoming the former. Called from his rebellion and hidden life of shepherding, Moses was interrupted by the Angel of Yahweh in the burning bush and called to the mission God had for him (Exodus 3:1-12).[67] Already part of the family of Abraham, Moses was now being elevated to a closer relationship with Yahweh, with the promise that God would be "with him," (3:12), eventually being allowed to see God's backside glory (33:22). Inherent in Moses' call to follow God was the mission to bring his people out of slavery under the false god-king of Egypt (3:10), and into the freedom of a new land, new laws, and a whole new way of being human.[68]

Moses' reluctance to follow the calling of Yahweh provides an interesting insight into the journey of any disciple—the fear, doubt, and insecurity[69] which accompanies such a call.[70]

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66. "The Lexham Figurative Language of the New Testament Dataset," in *Lexham Figurative Language of the Bible Glossar*y, ed. Joshua R. Westbury et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

67. "And God called unto him' is the usual 'call formula' employed by Yahweh when he calls a prophet…" Eugene Carpenter, *Exodus, ed. H. Wayne House and William D. Barrick, vol. 1, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012), 200.

68. "Moses' role advanced the Abrahamic covenant promises, and formed the people of Israel into a distinct cultus. "One of the major ways the Mosaic Covenant (following the Exodus event) advanced the history of redemption from the time of Abraham was its constitution of Israel as a people out of clans and families… [T]he constitution of this holy nation in Moses' time was actually a specific fulfillment of God's promise of grace to Abraham to make of him a great people." Douglas F. Kelly, *Systematic Theology: Grounded in Holy Scripture and Understood in the Light of the Church, vol. 1* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2008), 403.

69. This insecurity will be noted as a common gap in anyone seeking to live out a wholistic form of discipleship in chapter 4.

70. "If Moses lives in our memories as the towering leader of Israel in deliverance and pilgrimage, it is well to remember where he started—insecure, uncertain, unprepared, unworthy and un-almost-everything-else! It is also well to remember how patiently the Lord took him at point after point and ministered reassurance to him."; Alec Motyer, *The Message of Exodus: The Days of Our Pilgrimage, ed. Alec Motyer and Derek Tidball, The Bible Speaks Today* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2005), 60.

Such honest, human language gives the reader a reminder that the call to follow God as a disciple is a call to humans full of doubt and anxiety—echoes of sin's ruination. It also reminds the reader that the activities of discipleship move through stages—from rebellion to reconciliation, from reconciliation to the establishment of new foundations, and from these foundations to empower other generations. Yet, it was precisely through this call that Moses would grow to become a strong, faithful leader, despite his flaws.[71]

A further development should also be noted, namely the empowering signs (הָאוֹת) that would accompany Moses' declaration of the "good news" of Israel's coming deliverance (4:1-17). In choosing the word "sign," instead of a number of other words he could have chosen for "miracle,"[72] the author suggests that there was a message to which the miracle would point—something future disciples would pick up on, and carry forward in their own writings.[73] Further, it adds to the observations that to be a disciple of Yahweh is not merely to do so in one's own strength, but in the strength of him who calls.[74]

Additionally, we would be remiss not to note the development of that group which was called to join Moses as he followed the presence of Yahweh and completed his mission—Moses'

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71. For more on Moses' leadership development through his calling, see Ari Zivotofsky, "The Leadership Qualities of Moses," *Judaism*, 43 no 3 Sum 1994, 258-269.; Arthur Wolak, *Religion and Contemporary Management: Moses as a Model for Effective Leadership* (New York, NY: Anthem Press, 2016).; Gareth Weldon Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry: An Integrative Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993).

72. Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver and Charles Augustus Briggs. *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. electronic ed., (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000), 16.

73. John's gospel makes significant connections with Exodus using the pattern of sign-miracles to attest to a message. See John Dennis, "The Presence and Function of Second Exodus-Restoration Imagery in John 6" *Studien zum Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt.* 30 (2005): 105-121. "The consistent and strategic use of exodus-Moses echoes in John 6 suggests that the first exodus provided John with elements that were important in his presentation of Jesus. Imagery such as the expected 'prophet like Moses,' sign-miracles . . . show that the day of restoration is here and that Jesus the Messiah, the prophet like Moses par excellence, is now bringing about a second exodus restoration that will lead to eternal life and the restoration of a new community."

74. A disciple's activities which are empowered by the Spirit will be highlighted as a critical gap in chapter 4.

spiritual and natural family. God's giving of Aaron (3:14) and Miriam the prophetess (15:20-21) as co-laborers would prove critical to Moses' assignment. For the purposes of this thesis-project, it adds to the idea that a disciple's identity is to be found within (not without) spiritual family.

As Moses followed God's call into Egypt to bring deliverance to Israel, another part of our definition comes into focus—the mission for which a disciple is called, to go into the world. As he preached the message of Yahweh's deliverance and demonstrated powerful signs, Israel was led out of bondage, through the Red Sea, to the mountain of God. It was here that Yahweh gave Moses the terms of their covenant relationship, the form of the tabernacle, and the rules by which they would live freely as God's people in God's land (Exodus 19-40). But these rules and regulations under Yahweh's leadership were not about control, but about the restoration of freedom to be the divine imagers[75] humans were made to be.[76] Under God's tutelage, Israel would learn to be a "kingdom of priests," (Exodus 19:6) "spreading the light of God's tabernacling presence to the rest of the dark world,"[77] fulfilling the covenant promise to Abraham that his children would bless the nations.

Israel as Yahweh's Disciples

As the family of Abraham grew, so too did the framework of their discipleship under Yahweh. The call of Adam and Abraham are echoed in every subsequent call from prophets and

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75. Old Testament scholar Michael Heiser has written on this. "We are created to image God, to be his imagers. It is what we are by definition. The image is not an ability we have, but a status. We are God's representatives on earth. To be human is to image God. This is why Genesis 1:26–27 is followed by what theologians call the "dominion mandate" in verse 28. The verse informs us that God intends us to be him on this planet. We are to create more imagers ("be fruitful and multiply … fill") in order to oversee the earth by stewarding its resources and harnessing them for the benefit of all human imagers ("subdue … rule over")." Heiser, *Unseen,* 42-43.

76. c.f., Wilkins, *Following the Master,* 72.

77. G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 2011), KL 1564.

priests to Israel to follow God with all their hearts.[78] Israel's primary identity as those who followed Yahweh was built into the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). The very command which begins with, "hear," was to be daily repeated in response to the call of Yahweh in the Torah.[79] And they were not to hear the call to follow as individuals merely, but as a national family,[80] God calling them his firstborn (Exodus 4:22). Picking up this theme, later prophets would call God's son, Israel, back to obedience (Jeremiah 31:9) and to their mission to be a light to the nations (Isaiah 49:6). Tragically, Israel failed to follow Yahweh and lost their freedom, falling back into slavery under Assyria and Babylon. Yet, God was not done with his people, and sent prophets to proclaim the end of their exile (Isaiah 40-66, Ezekiel 36-48), the restoration of their place in God's family, and their empowerment by the coming of the Spirt (Ezekiel 39:29, Joel 2:28-29),[81] as well as the coming of a better son (Psalm 2, Daniel 2, 7)[82] who would teach them God's ways

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78. "[T]he prophets call Israel to be the people through whom YHWH will act in relation to the whole world. The point of this, in terms (for the moment) of Israel's own role, is that she is taking the place—under God and over the world—which according to the Genesis picture was the place of Adam." N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God, Christian Origins and the Question of God* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1992), 264.

79. Douglas S. Huffman and Jamie N. Hausherr, "Shema, the," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

80. "The word "family" describes a complex and varied unit of social connection and interaction (Meyers, "The Family in Early Israel," 1). Meyers describes the family unit as "the fundamental human collective" and argues that "study of the family should be an important part of any attempt to understand a particular society"—including Israel (Meyers, "The Family in Early Israel," 1). Three main perspectives have emerged regarding the institution of family, each of which can contribute to the study of early Israelite family groups (Meyers, "The Family in Early Israel," 8).; William Raccah, "Sociology and the Old Testament," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

81. Beale says, "Joel's promise of the Spirit for Israel is being anticipated as a promise to be fulfilled among gentiles, which the remainder of Acts will narrate (e.g., Acts 10:44–47). Furthermore, the promise of an expanding temple in Isaiah is viewed as beginning fulfillment with the outpouring and expansion of the divine Spirit."; Beale, *NTBT,* KL 2524-2526.

82. Once again, Beale makes this connection clear, "The portrayal of Babylon in Dan. 2 makes allusion to Gen. 1:26–28 [134] in order to set it up as the pseudocounterpart to Israel's end-time kingdom headed up by the Son of Man, who is portrayed as a latter-day Adam figure ("the son of Adam"), who is king over all the beasts and people of the earth," Beale, *NTBT,* KL 2125.

once more and lead them into God's promised future of freedom to image God and fulfill the purposes for which Adam was created.

Their identity as a nation of disciples thus settled, they were commanded to act commensurate with that identity. From land conquest to faithful obedience, Israel's whole purpose was to engage the world with the message and presence of God (Genesis 12, Isaiah 42:6, 49:6). Individually, each Israelite family was to teach their children the ways of God (Deut. 4:9-11). Established in the law, the Kingdom, and the priestly rituals, each Israelite was to love God with his whole self (Deut. 6:4-9) and build lives of obedience upon Torah. God himself promised to equip Israel with all they needed for this high and holy calling. He said to Joshua "Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses… Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them." (Josh. 1:3, 5-6). God promised to empower Joshua with his presence, and entrusted this great mission to him. Yet after Joshua, the history of Israel was one of spiraling disintegration,[83] punctuated by signs and seasons of hope.

The Three Discipleship Perspectives in The Three Offices

During Israel's monarchy, three offices emerged to secure national identity, encourage faithful activity, and lead the nation in the actual life of their calling: these were the offices of prophet, priest, and king (E.g., 1 Kings 1:32, 34). The role of the prophet was to speak God's

83. The period of the Judges is called a "downward spiral." See F. Duane Lindsey, "Judges," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 396.; "Judges depicts its heroes' moral behavior as a downward spiral." Trent C. Butler and Amy L. Balogh, "Judges, Book of," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

word, remind of his truth, and call the nation back to their identity.[84] The priest ministered to God on behalf of the people, both performing and regulating the activities of devotion to Yahweh.[85] The King, in relationship with the prophet and priest, led the nation, and set the tone for the every day experience of the nation and her citizens,[86] with good kings leading the nation toward blessing,[87] and bad kings toward the curses of disobedience.[88] With some imagination, these three offices can be mapped onto the heuristic for discipleship promulgated in this thesis, with the prophet holding responsibility for Israel's identity, the priest for their spirituality, and the king for activity.

Of course, neatly mapping the offices does not mean that they were limited to *only* those roles. Moses was a prophet (Exodus 7:1), yet he also led the nation as a theocratic figurehead. David was a king who wrote the words of God (Psalms 3-9, etc.), yet was rebuked by a prophet (2 Samuel 12:7). And the later prophets would predict a future wherein the people of God would be so renewed in their identity, activity, and experience of God's presence, that no

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84. "In the OT, a prophet is a person, either male or female, who functions as God's spokesperson and is commissioned by him to deliver his word, either to individuals or to groups."; Aaron C. Fenlason, "Prophets," ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook, Lexham Bible Reference Series* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

85. "In the representative office of priest, the ideal state of holiness and the role of mediation were focused and maintained in order to preserve and facilitate Israel's service before God."; Allen C. Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 848.

86 King is "a title of dignity and authority, as applied to God the universal Ruler, or to Christ as the head of the mediatorial government, or to man exercising dominion over his fellow-men."; Thomas J. Shepherd, *The Westminster Bible Dictionary* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1880), 302.

87. For an explanation of the role of a king, the NBD says, "The main responsibility of the king was the maintenance of righteousness (Is. 11:1–4; Je. 33:15), possibly signified by the possession of the testimonies or law or tôrâ (Dt. 17:18ff.; 1 Sa. 10:25; 1 Ki. 9:4ff.; 2 Ki. 11:12), with the duty not only to act as judge (1 Ki. 3:28) but to preserve justice and proclaim the law (2 Ki. 23:2; cf. 2 Ch. 17:7ff.; cf. also Jdg. 17:6)."; B. O. Banwell, "King, Kingship," ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 646.

88. Again, the NBD says, "But many of the kings were wicked themselves and encouraged injustice and wickedness to flourish, not only in the schismatic N kingdom but in the S too (1 Ki. 14:16; 2 Ki. 21:16)."; B. O. Banwell, "King, Kingship," ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 646.

such offices would be necessary (Joel 2:28, Ezekiel 47-48) because God would be among his people once again. But before that prophesied future could become a reality, the new Adam—the true prophet, priest, and King would come. Thus Morales says:

> [I]t is possible to comprehend the progress of redemptive history according to what we may call 'God's three sons': Adam was the first firstborn, who functioned as prophet, priest and king. Secondly, God created a corporate firstborn son, Israel. (Due to humanity's estate of sin and misery there was a separation of powers, as it were, with the distribution of the offices of prophet, priest and king among the members of Israel distinctly.) Finally, as the last Adam and true Israel, the Son of God dawned, as prophet, priest and king, now conforming humanity to himself as the image and likeness of God.[89]

Exile as Disintegration, Again

The hopes of Israel faithfully embodying their discipleship under Yahweh were dashed upon the rocks of disobedience, and eventually God's people were carried off into exile (2 Kings 25). The writers of the Old Testament cast exile in similar tones to the exclusion of Adam and Eve from the garden, with one commentator noting:

> The expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden is the archetype of all subsequent exile (Gen. 3:24). Paradise has been lost because of their sin, and now they must live as strangers in a land from which they have become alienated (Gen. 3:17–19). Throughout the rest of the Bible, the state of God's people is one of profound exile, of living in a world to which they do not belong and looking for a world that is yet to come.[90]

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89. L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?: A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 37, New Studies in Biblical Theology* (England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press, 2015), 236.

90. I. M. Duguid, "Exile," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, electronic ed.* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 475–476.

Just as the first disciples of Yahweh—Adam and Eve—would suffer from the disintegration of sin, now Israel would similarly suffer.[91] Her refusal of the vocation to be a light to the nations (activity) as God's people (identity) led to suffering and prophetic silence (spirituality). No longer integrated under their prophets, priests, and kings, where life before God and within the world would be one, they would now serve another nation. Yahweh's disciples were scattered. As if written to describe Israel's utter inability to faithfully follow Yahweh, the story of the Old Testament closes as it began—in chaos. But, just as before, the brooding waters would soon hear the word of the Lord once more, as the the truly faithful Son appears to create a new humanity of disciples.

Christ, the Faithful Disciple

One of the many ways to understand the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is as a new and better Adam (Rom. 5:12-21).[92] As the better Adam, he perfectly embodies the integrated, whole-life discipleship that Adam failed to maintain—all of which he did for us, the Church (1 Cor. 15:45). The synoptics are careful to establish Jesus' identity[93] in their shared baptismal narratives, whereby the Father announces in his own voice, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased," (Mark 1:11). John begins his gospel with a similar concern,

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91. The books of 1 and 2 Chronicles connect exile from the land with Adam and Eve's exile from the garden. "The Chronicler's interpretation of history highlights three areas where God's activity was of special significance. Firstly, Israel's history from beginning to end belongs in the context of God's purposes for the whole world. The work accordingly traces Israel's origins and those of the nations back to Adam…"; M. J. Selman, "Chronicles," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, electronic ed.* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 189.

92. New-Adam christology began with Paul (Rom. 5:14; 1 Cor. 15:22, 45). For an extensive and helpful study into this topic, see Yongbom Lee, *The Son of Man as the Last Adam: The Early Church Tradition as a Source of Paul's Adam Christology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012).

93. This author notes that each gospel emphasizes different aspects of Christ's identity. Mark simply notes he is the one prophesied by Isaiah (Mark 1:1-3), Matthew his Adamic and David lineage (Matthew 1:1-17), and Luke the miraculous nature of his birth (Luke 1-2).

establishing Jesus' identity as the incarnate word who brings light and life to the world (John 1:1-18).[94] His identity clear, the Gospel narratives all move to his activity, with Mark especially noting the immediacy of his fasting in the desert, his temptation by the satan, and his victory (Mark 1:12-13).[95] Where Adam faltered under the serpent's temptations, Christ remained faithful, allowing him to proclaim the spirituality of his coming Kingdom with the message, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). It should also be noted that Jesus' integrated identity, activity, and experienced reality before his Father was inextricably connected to that identity, activity, and spirituality in the world as he accomplished his mission. In Christ not only do we find a reintegration of the Adamic loss, but the reunification of the Godward and world-ward poles along which human life was originally designed to be experienced.[96] Just as in Jesus Christ the divine and human natures are unified fully in one person, in his ministry he is ushering in a reunification of Heaven and Earth. It was just such an embodied, wholistic reality for which Jesus would call his disciples to pray (Matt. 6:9-13), to preach (Luke 9:6), and to disciple others (Matt 28:18-20)—the reunification of Heaven and Earth, God and his people.

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94. Among the many things going on in John's prologue, the establishment of Jesus' identity is foregrounded. "Because this Word, this divine self-expression, existed in the beginning, one might suppose that it was either with God, or nothing less than God himself. John insists the Word was both. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 116.

95. Mark is particularly action-oriented, with a faster literary pacing than the other gospels. the quick transitions; the frequent use of such words as straightway, immediately; the substitution of dialogue for narrative, and the general fulness of detail.; See Marvin Richardson Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament, vol. 1* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), 155., Donald English, *The Message of Mark: The Mystery of Faith, The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 16.

96. This thesis-project is too narrowly focused for a proper excursus on the hypostatic union, here we can only affirm the historic, orthodox understanding of this doctrine, as Hodge says, "The simple, sublime, and saving Christology of the Bible and of the Church universal is: 'That the eternal Son of God became man by taking to Himself a true body and a reasonable soul, and so was and continues to be God and man in two distinct natures and one person forever.'"; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, vol. 2* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 454.

It was Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea (d 340), who appears to have first observed the *munus triplex* in the Scriptures (cf. Dt. 18:15; Ps. 110:4; Zec. 6:13).[97] As already claimed, these offices can be mapped onto the identity, activity and experience of a disciple; this, in turn, provide another way to map them onto Christ as the true disciple. To say that Christ was a disciple is, of course, to introduce a curiosity. Did not Christ call disciples? If so, how can he be his own disciple? But of course, this is to embrace a parochial definition of that word, not the one offered here. Cast in the light of the present thesis-project, Christ not only calls and enables our discipleship, but himself accomplishes faithful discipleship on our behalf, enabling any who trust him to become disciples *of* him, becoming *like* him.

In taking his place as the "prophet like Moses," (Dt. 18:15), Christ came to proclaim that any who would trust in his gospel might be born again (John 3:16), and graciously given a new identity.[98] From this new nature, new actions would spring up.[99] As our perfect priest, Christ embodies the activity of a faithful disciple on our behalf,[100] yet as high priest he experiences the

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97. W. S. Reid, "Christ, Offices of," ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised* (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988), 653.

98. Paul certainly understood faith in Christ to create a newness within the disciple, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come," (2 Cor. 5:17). Peter did as well, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy," (1 Pet. 2:9–10).

99. Paul's whole argument for resisting sin is that, in Christ, one is a new kind of being. Therefore, new actions follow, no longer bound and subject the rule and reign of sin, because, "Christians are not bound. Their salvation is God's free gift. They are not dependent on their own ability to keep the law. They are free from the tyranny of sin and of law."; Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 259.

100. Barth explains Christ's embodies priestly and sacrificial suffering. "Precisely because Jesus Christ intervenes on our behalf by His suffering and obedience, we, regardless of the actual insincerity, superficiality and imperfection of our outward and inward achievement, are and remain in all circumstances and without intermission claimed for obedience to God's Law and therefore for Christian life in love for God and man."; Karl Barth, *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God according to the Teaching of the Reformation,* trans. J. L. M. Haire and Ian Henderson (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2005), xxii.

suffering and death to which those former, shadowy ministrations point.[101] And, as the true King of Kings, his life, death, resurrection, and victorious ascension[102] inaugurate the Kingdom of God in this world.[103]

Christ, the Faithful Disciple-Maker

Not only is Christ the first and only perfect disciple of his Father, but he is also the first and only perfect disciple-maker. It is here, in the heart of Christ's ministry and teaching, that our definitions and word choices become clear. If the three *loci* of discipleship—identity, activity, and spirituality—are at all biblical, then they must derive from the disciple-making efforts of Christ. Happily, they do. Indeed, all the observations of this chapter culminate in the teaching, activity, and reported experience of the ministry of Jesus in the Gospels.

After fasting for forty days, Christ called his first disciples (Mark 1:16-20, Matt. 4:18-22, Luke 5:2-11, John 1:35-51). Mark's economical account reports that Christ said, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men," (1:16). Thus, the Savior was offering

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101. Another explanation of the priesthood of Christ, Samuel Woodbridge notes, "The dogmatic proofs of the High Priesthood of Christ are too numerous to be advanced in this place. The Bible, from the beginning, has been a book for the people, and all readers of this book who are willing by simple faith to accept the testimony of God, understand the language so often and clearly uttered, that Christ has ransomed His people, that He has bought them with His own blood, that He has washed them from their sins in His blood, and that without shedding of blood there is no remission." Samuel M. Woodbridge, "Christ, the High Priest of the World," *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review 1*, no. 1–4 (1890): 391.

102. Patrick Schreiner argues that Jesus' work would be incomplete without his ascent, and was necessary, marking a turning point in his three-fold offices of prophet, priest, and king. See Patrick Schreiner, *The Ascension of Christ: Recovering a Neglected Doctrine* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020).

103. The Kingdom of God began with the outpouring of the Spirit. "Hence the kingdom is God's divine, kingly reign as proclaimed and inaugurated by Jesus' life, ministry, death and resurrection, and the subsequent outpouring of the Spirit into the world." Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 71. Also, Lugt notes, "[E]vangelicals have at times reduced the gospel to individual salvation, corrupted the gospel through alliance with political agendas, and contradicted the gospel through practices and lifestyles of colonialism, racism, and consumerism. Others have understood and demonstrated a full-orbed gospel, the good news that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior and the King of the universe who forgives sins, inaugurates a peaceful kingdom, and makes all things new by his Spirit." Wesley Vander Lugt, "Review of Prophetic Evangelicals: Envisioning a Just and Peaceable Kingdom." *Themelios 37*, no. 3 (2012): 608.

to the young fisherman not just a new job, but a new way of being[104]—an identity that starts by responding to the invitation, "Come, follow me." Foundational to the identity[105] of any disciple[106] is that he follow Christ.[107] The next most obvious part of their identity came with the word "fish" (1:17),[108] for following Jesus was never only about the relationship between Christ and his disciple, but the mission of God from the beginning, to be fruitful and multiply[109] and to bless the nations.[110] Yet, the grandness of this mission is brought to these young men in a way they could understand, in pithy analogy: fishers of men.[111] This summons of Jesus contains even more, though; it contains a call to follow Jesus as fishers of men, *with others* who are doing the

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104. Put succinctly by Johnson, he says, "When Jesus Christ speaks these words to his disciples, he not only is calling them to a life of faith and obedience, but he also is unveiling their eternal destiny." Keith L. Johnson, *Theology as Discipleship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), KL 39.

105. The Greek is more emphatic about a transformation of their identity, using the word γενέσθαι, with Jesus saying literally, "I will make you become," carrying with it more than just the assignment of a new job, but transformation into a new kind of person.

106. It cannot be overlooked that the invitation to follow given by a rabbi ran counter to rabbinical custom. "On this particular point Jesus was a very different leader from the rabbis and scribes of Judaism. There are no rabbinical stories analogous to the calling of the disciples, for rabbis did not consummate the teacher-student relationship by the summons, 'Follow me.' Unlike the decisive call that comes from Jesus, entry into a rabbinical school depended on the initiative of the aspiring student, not the call of a rabbi."; James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 49.

107. "Follower" is quintessential to the early name for Christians recorded by Luke in Acts (9:2, 19:9, 24:22). One cannot be part of a way without following Jesus on it, after all. "Behind this term again lies the concept of 'the way of the Lord/God' (18:25f.) as the 'way of salvation' (16:17). God has appointed the way or manner of life which men should follow if they wish to be saved."; I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary, vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 178.

108. Fishing obviously did not mean actual fishing, but fishing for humans. "The purpose of the summons was to make the two fishermen 'fishers of men.' The idea of God calling persons to fish for people is found in the Old Testament, most clearly in Jer 16:16; but there the purpose was to bring people to judgment. Here it was to escape judgment."; James A. Brooks, *Mark, vol. 23, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 48.

109. Beale, G. K.. *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MIL Baker Publishing Group, 2012), KL1441-1443.

110. Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12–21, vol. 25B, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 150–151.

111. Donald English, *The Message of Mark: The Mystery of Faith, The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 53.

same thing.[112] In other words, disciples were to consider themselves part of a new community—a spiritual family.[113]

These three words: follower, fisher, and family—are important. But, if these were all we had one might be left to wonder if Jesus' mission was to infantilize the disciples, leaving them forever locked in their roles within the household of faith. That is why we require the fourth word: free. Not immediately obvious from the call narratives, this word is more obvious in the gospel of John. In 8:31-36 Jesus says:

> "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?" Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

Truly being Christ's disciple involves a freedom—freedom from sin's disintegration[114] and freedom to live a truer human life.[115] Later in life, Peter would admonish the disciples he made to "Live as people who are free" (1 Pe 2:16).

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112. The disciples were discipled together. "Jesus taught a community of disciples and not a mere group of individual learners. Indeed he called them in order that they should become members of a community with himself." Keith Ferdinando, "Jesus, the Theological Educator," *Themelios 38,* no. 3 (2013): 369.

113. The disciples did not merely relate to Jesus individually, but were made to do so together, in close-knit relationships. That is why he referred to them as his brothers (Matt. 12:48). This familial terminology carried over into the rest of NT when referring to the relationships between disciples (Rom. 7:4, 14:15, James 2:1, Col. 1:2, et. al.).

114. Carson speaks clearly about the disintegrating effects of sin. "[True] faith costs not less than everything, and the freedom it brings presupposes that life before such faith is pitiful slavery." D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 348.

115. Eternal life is experience in some way right now—at least, it is meant to be. "Believing in the Son issues in life eternal (zōēn aiōnion), which contains a present element…"; Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1–11, vol. 25A, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 303.

Not only did Jesus clarify the identity of his disciples, but he gave them clear instructions regarding their activity. Any reading of The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) makes it obvious that Jesus wants his disciples to 'go and do likewise'.[116] For the rest of the New Testament, engaging the world with the message of Jesus would be a universally assumed *sine qua non* of discipleship. Furthermore, the disciples were established in the words, the ways, and the power of their master.[117] Jesus told his disciples to go out, "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you," (Matt 28:19-20). Baptizing and teaching refers to establishing these new disciples in the church through the sacraments and basic catechesis,[118] yet not as an end in itself. These disciplines and catechesis were to equip and empower them with the presence of Jesus[119] so that they might go and do the same.

When Christ made disciples, their spirituality changed as a result of their new identity and activity. Put simply, being new in Christ and doing as he did brought about a different state of affairs for the disciples and for the world.[120] Jesus' engagement of the first disciples to come follow him, was nothing less than a summons to a whole new way of being *and* doing. He would

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116. Note in the intentional linguistic parallel between Matthew's call account, "καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς, Δεῦτε ὀπίσω μου, καὶ ποιήσω ὑμᾶς ἁλιεῖς ἀνθρώπων," (4:19) and his commission, " πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη," (28:19a). Just as Jesus *made* them his disciples, they were to go *make* others.

117. Luke notes specifically how the disciples were together, and very conscious of their mission to proclaim the gospel and make disciples, and once power came from the Spirit for the mission, the mission to the nations got underway in earnest (Acts 1-3).

118. Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven, The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 322.

119. Green also says, "The presence and the authority of Jesus are specifically attached to his command to fulfill the Great Commission."; Green, *The Message of Matthew,* 323.

120. The focus of this paper is too narrow to adequately explore all the ways the disciple-making revolution begun by Jesus changed the world. For a larger accounting of all the ways the Christian story has had an indelible impact on civilization, see Tom Holland, *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2019).

establish them in their new identities, treating them as family (John 15:15). He would equip them through training, impartation, and experience (Luke 9:1-6, c.f. Matt. 10:1; Mark 3:13–15; 6:7).[121] Eventually, however, these disciples were left by their master, empowered by the Spirit, and freed in Christ to live differently than the sin-enslaved world around them, to live into their calling—the dream of God for their lives.

Before his ascension, "Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.' And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld'" (John 20:21–23). And with that, the experience of the first disciple (Adam) and the new humanity called by the perfect disciple (Jesus) comes full circle. Just as Yahweh breathed into Adam, Christ breathed into his new body. Just as Adam was given authority to rule as a priest-king, Christ gave authority to this new, royal, priestly, and prophetic people (1 Peter 2:9-10) called the Church. And, just as Adam was sent to take the culture of the garden-temple into the world, the final Adam sends his disciples, a new humanity, to take the culture of the Kingdom into the world as his new, living temple.

There is something profoundly dignifying about such a spirituality. Discipleship is no narrow bible-study, but the Spirit-breathed adventure of obedience that Christ purchased for us. To those who are empowered by the Spirit, freed to become the new humanity the gospel creates (and is creating), God instantiates the lived experience promised in the Psalms, "Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart," (Psalm 37:4) and prophesied by

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121. Leon Morris notes this connection in his commentary, saying, "[Jesus thought] it was important both to spread the message of the kingdom and to give the disciples experience… They were thus adequately equipped with power and the authority to use it…" Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary, vol. 3, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 181–183.

Isaiah, "then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth," (Isaiah 58:14), which sounds not unlike a dream come true.

The Church as Eschatological Spiritual Family

So far, it has been demonstrated that a biblical definition of a disciple is a human, fully alive and integrated in his identity, activity, and spirituality, living in communion with the Trinity and oriented toward the world, rightly. This section shall demonstrate how the New Testament church consciously understood itself as a thus constituted—an eschatological, spiritual family which sought to produce such disciples in the world as an act of obedience. Beale sees this discipleship theme coming full circle in the Church:

> The New Testament pictures Christ and the church as finally having done what Adam, Noah, and Israel had failed to do in extending the temple of God's presence throughout the world. Luke 2:32 and Acts 26:23 picture Christ as fulfilling this commission to be a 'light' to the end of the earth (an allusion to the Servant Israel's commission in Is. 49:6). This is why Matthew 28:18 portrays Jesus as the Son of Man saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.' This is an allusion to the prophecy of Daniel 7:13–14, where it is said of the 'Son of Man', 'authority was given to him, and all the nations of the earth … [were] serving him' (so lxx]). On the basis of this authority, Jesus then gives the well-known commission 'therefore, as you go, disciple all the nations, baptizing them … teaching them to keep all things whichsoever I commanded you; and, behold, I am with you all the days until the end of the age'. Notice that Christ uses the same accompaniment formula as God used with the commissioning of his people in the Old Testament to subdue and rule over the earth. His presence will enable them to fulfil 'the great commission' to rule over and fill the earth with God's presence, which Adam, Noah and Israel had failed to carry out.[122]

The New Testament church has a strong sense of identity, but not along the more common lines of family or nationality. Initially constituted by Jews of the Second-Temple

122. G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 17, New Studies in Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL; England: InterVarsity Press; Apollos, 2004), 169.

period,[123] those national boundary markers[124] were soon swept away[125] by the Church, which understood itself as those following Jesus from all nations (Acts 2:42-47, 1 Peter 2:9), fishing for men and women as a family,[126] yet free in Christ to be something new (Col. 3:11), looking forward to the return of its king (Rom. 8:19) and the reunification of Heaven and Earth (Rev. 21:10). Because the church (and its constituents) understood itself in this way, it was free to act differently in the world. Acts records the various ways the burgeoning group of disciples actively engaged others with the gospel (Acts 2:42-47, 8:25, 13:49, 19:20), establishing new communities all throughout the region (Acts 9:31) and later the broader Roman world (13:49, 16:5), equipped with knowledge and power (1:8, 4:33), and empowering others to go make disciples (8:14, 13:3, 15:22-23).

The spirituality of the church was marked most significantly by the actual presence of the risen Christ[127] in the power of his Spirit.[128] to be a universal prophetic instrument of God in the world. Jan du Rand notes:

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123. The literature of the Second-Temple period and its impact on our understanding of theology is not the subject of this paper, but a cursory understanding of the Second-Temple Period and its impact on the early church can be found in part 3 of N. T. Wright's *The New Testament and the People of God, Christian Origins and the Question of God* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1992), 145.

124. I am knowingly invoking a phrase used in the discussion around the so-called "New Perspective." Though that is not the subject of this paper, the insight that at least *part* of what was at stake in the first Jerusalem council (Acts 15) is helpful to understand the transition from the ways law obedience served to mark out those who were part of the nation of Israel to the new way of Spirit-enabled faith in the gospel as the key maker of identity in the eschatological, spiritual family of the growing church. See Michael F. Bird, *The Saving Righteousness of God: Studies on Paul, Justification and the New Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007), 106.

125. L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans publishing co., 1938), 571.

126. The constant use of the word ἀδελφος indicates that amongst the churches a familial relationship was in view. See Joseph Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as a Family* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 64-72.

127. Duvall, J. Scott. *God's Relational Presence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group), 183.

128. Eddie L Hyatt, *2000 Years Of Charismatic Christianity: A 21st Century Look at Church History from a Pentecostal/Charismatic Perspective* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2002), 9.

> This is the prophetic witness of the Church, and to equip the Church for its mission, the Spirit as agent of visionary experience works through the Christian prophets within the Church. Both activities of the Holy Spirit are the witness of Jesus and the word of God, and both fulfill the indispensable role of conquering. The Spirit conquers the Church to be God's eschatological people in their prophetic witness, and the seven Spirits enable the Church to fulfill its prophetic ministry to the world, convincing the nations of God's kingship on earth as it is in heaven.[129]

As they proclaimed the gospel, the Holy Spirit was working powerfully among them, fulfilling the prophetic expectations of Jesus (Luke 12:12, Matthew 10:20, John 14:12) and actualizing what Machen called, "a prime condition of gospel progress."[130] The Spirit animated their reconciliation to God and each other,[131] and fueled a new desire for God (1 Cor. 12:31, 14:1) that outpaced and outmatched their desire for sin, this world, and its false promises (Col. 3:5-10). This Spirit-given desire for God led them into mission (Acts 2:42, Titus 3:14), often at terrible cost (Acts 8:1-3).[132] Yet, in their discipleship the church sought to actualize the promises inherent in their apprenticeship to the Master—his presence, his power, his peace, his justice, and the hope that comes from the conviction that he will return.

> The early church understood itself to be the eschatological community, the recipient of God's end-of-time saving promises… The Old Testament had promised that in the "last days" God would pour out His Spirit and make all things new (Isa 32:15; 44:3; Joel

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129. A. Du Rand, "'Let Him Hear What the Spirit Says. . . .' The Functional Role and Theological Meaning of the Spirit in the Book of Revelation," Ex Auditu 12 (1996): 58.

130. John Gresham Machen, *The Literature and History of New Testament Times* (Philadelphia, PA: The Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath School Work, 1915), 284.

131. Donald G. Bloesch, *Freedom for Obedience: Evangelical Ethics in Contemporary Times* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 191.

132. And one implication of true discipleship in the canonical Gospels is the possibility of dying for one's adherence to Jesus (cf. Matt 10:38 = Luke 14:27; Mark 8:34–35 = Matt 16:24–25 = Luke 9:23–24; Luke 17:33; John 12:25–26; 1 Pet 2:21; Rev 12:11),"; David E. Aune, "Following the Lamb: Discipleship in the Apocalypse," in *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament,* ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 275.

> 2:28). At Pentecost, the early church interpreted the Spirit's presence among them as the sign that God's promises had arrived…[133]

This combination of the church's self-understanding (identity), and their rigorous efforts to advance the gospel, work for justice, and promote the ethics of the Kingdom (activity), was a result of the spiritual power and presence (spirituality) which was birthed at Pentecost and experienced in their increasing integration toward God and each other. Such a collaboration between gospel identity, obedient activity, and lived spirituality has implications for wholistic discipleship which are thrilling to consider.

Conclusion

This brief, biblical theology of discipleship explored the three perspectives on discipleship promulgated in this thesis-project—identity, activity, and spirituality—within the larger biblical story. In a world disintegrated by sin, this bigger, biblically robust vision of discipleship lends credence to the idea that a disciple is one whose identity, activity, and spirituality have been and are being re-integrated before God and the world, by faith in the gospel, and discipleship is, therefore, the process of this reintegration.

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133. Joshua M. Greever, "Church," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE AND RESOURCE REVIEW

Introduction

Jesus ended his earthly ministry commanding his disciples to go and make more disciples (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-47; John 20:21). Every generation since has had to contend with how to do this. While the scope of this literature review is far too narrow to provide a practical-theological history of disciple-making,[134] what will follow is a review of those conversation partners, authors, and leaders who have guided me on *my* attempt at fidelity to the call to go make disciples in my own generation, my own place, and among my own people. Therefore, much of what will be here discussed is recent and popular literature within the Western, Protestant, and Evangelical world.

The approach here will be a narrative one, following the patterns of growth and learning toward wholistic discipleship at Aletheia Church with which this thesis-project is concerned. We shall proceed along lines similar to the introduction, recalling first those authors who introduced good practice (activity) to me. Then, attention will be given to those authors and leaders who helped give theological clarity (identity) to discipleship. In many ways, this will evidence itself as the well-worn dialectic between orthodoxy and orthopraxy. But that dialectic will be made more complex by discussing the authors who brought insight into the needed third dimension of spirituality. Final consideration will be given to those who seemed to approximate (to greater or lesser degrees) the ultimate desire of this thesis-project—that of wholistic, integrated discipleship

134. For a helpful history of discipleship practices, see Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006).; Longenecker, Richard N., ed., *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996).

combining faithful activity (orthopraxy), faithful belief (orthodoxy), and faith-filled, transformative spirituality (orthopathy).

Disintegrated Discipleship

The first book I ever read about discipleship was Robert Coleman's *The Master Plan of Evangelism.* Given to me by my campus minister, he hoped it would help me be a good small group leader, but its effect was greater than that. With 3.5 million copies sold since its publication in 1963, Coleman's book not only influenced me, but millions of others. Reacting to what he perceived as an over-dependance on programs,[135] his brief, penetrating study outlines eight principles he observed in Jesus' method of disciple-making: selection, association, consecration, impartation, demonstration, delegation, supervision, and reproduction. Coleman sought to distill the principles that lay under Jesus' ministry and outline something richer than better church programming.[136] In so doing, he wrote what is still among the most robust and influential works on discipleship.[137] At once very practical and theological, this book represents a good, early attempt at an integrated approach to discipleship, bringing the activity and identity concerns together. Indeed, his eight principles map neatly between the activity and identity *loci* of our own definition.[138] See the figure below for an example:

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135. Robert Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 2000), 12-13.

136. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism,* 14.

137. Other influential books include J.I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God.* (IVP: UK, 1961).; Gary W Kuhne, *The Dynamics of Discipleship Training: Being and Producing Spiritual Leaders.* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978).; Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ Disciplemaker.* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1984).; A. B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1971).

138. I map Coleman's insights between the identity and activity domains as a provisional tool, to position his thinking amongst my own. The "Four E's" will be further explicated as this paper unfolds.

Figure 3. Coleman's Discipleship Principles

A disciple is one whose identity, activity, and spirituality have been and are being re-integrated before God and the world, by faith in the gospel. Discipleship is the process of this reintegration.

IDENTITY	COLEMAN'S PRINCIPLES	ACTIVITY
Follower of Jesus	- Selection - Finding appropriate people with whom to share the gospel. - Association - Bringing those people into one's life.	**Engage** others with the gospel.
Family of Jesus	- Consecration - Teaching patterns of holiness. - Impartation - Teaching through familial relationship.	**Establish** in the scripture, the disciplines, and spiritual family
Fisher with Jesus	- Demonstration - Showing a disciple how to disciple. - Delegation - Giving controlled opportunities for doing.	**Equip** with the tools and opportunities to make disciples
Freed to be like Jesus	- Supervision - Watching over the new disciple's work. - Reproduction - The new disciple is making new disciples.	**Empower** others to lead, live, and love like disciples

Coleman's work has deeply influenced the wholistic program here advocated. Yet, with the benefit of hindsight, it seems that those programs to which his book was written as a correction have remained the central if not dominant factor of church growth.[139] While ministry within closed countries embodies the principles of Coleman's work particularly well,[140] here in the West, the fastest growing churches still rely heavily on programming—on activity. According to some commentators, this oddity illustrates a larger reality that "there has simply been no consistent general teaching or practice under the heading of discipleship among evangelicals…

139. There is much research to suggest that programming, not personal discipleship, is what has been and continues to drive church growth in the USA. See Pease, Joshua, 2017. "LifeWay Research: 'Boring' Church Programs Really Do Attract People." ChurchLeaders. August 31. https://churchleaders.com/news/309371-lifeway-research-boring-church-programs-really-do-attract-people-evangelism.html.

140. The growth of the church in closed countries cannot conceivably be attributed to programs, as Western evangelical churches have understood them. Rather, a commitment to the kinds of principles that Coleman outlines provide a better explanation. See Rebecca Lewis, "Strategizing for Church Planting Movements in the Muslim World," in *The International Journal of Frontier Missions,* 21:2 Summer, 2004, 73-77.

none that would be recognizable as discipleship in terms of biblical teaching or of the Christian past."[141]

Now, it would be a mistake to confuse a lack of "consistent general teaching," *about* discipleship for a lack of concern *for* discipleship. Such a lack may simply be an outworking of the entrepreneurial nature of post-WWII evangelicalism.[142] Many evangelical leaders—including Willard here—have detected a disintegration, not only across various practices of discipleship, but within evangelical thought about discipleship.[143] Yet, there remain great authors and practitioners like Coleman, Eims, Hull, and more, who teach a *lot* about discipleship. Perhaps Willard is simply noting a lack of consensus. Indeed, no clear answer to this conundrum seems to have yet risen to the top. So, the disintegrated nature of discipleship resources remains, leaving practitioners like myself stuck doing the work of synthesis, and making quite a few mistakes along the way.

Learning by Doing

My calling to vocational ministry took shape when I was twenty. Recently married to my high school sweetheart, we felt a radical, supernatural call to be part of an overseas church planting team in Edinburgh, UK. After a year of preparation, we began a difficult, rewarding

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141. Gerald R. McDermott and Dallas Willard, "Discipleship," in *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 245.

142. Indeed, this is the assertion of Willard in the aforementioned article. See Willard, "Discipleship," 246.

143. A motivation behind many books and resources from this period about discipleship is to address this disintegration between orthodoxy, orthopraxy, and lived spirituality in various ways. See Willard, "Discipleship," 247.; Steve Murrell, *WikiChurch: Making Discipleship Engaging, Empowering, and Viral* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2011) 7.; Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples.* (B&H Books: Nashville, TN, 2011) 23.; Tim Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 25-27.

adventure. Upon our arrival, I was introduced to the Church Growth Movement by my new pastor, as we drank deeply of its best insights, many of which I still practice. In his helpful study, *The Book of Church Growth,* Dr. Thom Rainer meticulously catalogues this movement's theology, activity, and history.[144] Eschewing the common criticism that this movement does not care about disciple-making, he writes, "While evangelism, in the sense of making converts, is of vital interest, the heart of church growth is to see those new Christians develop into fruit-bearing disciples of Jesus Christ. Most church growth leaders consider 'responsible church membership' to be a barometer for discipleship."[145] Rainer's research suggests this movement understood discipleship as "fruit bearing," and "making converts," as marks of health and formation, all of which is biblical. Yet, such definitions remain firmly action-oriented.[146] Such insights were instantiated in the processes of the new churches we helped to plant in Scotland, and as we employed their methods in disciple-making, we read other gifted practitioners.[147] This was a heady time, and I learned a lot about how to *do* church well—the value of excellence, environment, follow-up, and clarity. And as a leader in multiple church plants, I was able to employ much of my learning in my immediate context.

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144. Thom S. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth* (B&H: Nashville, TN, 1993).

145. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth,* 20.

146. We should not conclude that the church growth movement is shallowly unconcerned with discipleship. That is a straw man, and not the conclusion of this author. It is important to note, however, that one of the key innovations of this movement was to take disciple-making so seriously that its leaders like C.P. Wagner would look to active church membership as evidence of responsible discipleship. In other words, effective evangelism could be measured by numerical church growth (Rainer, *Church Growth,* 34).

147. Rainer notes, "Some of the new church growth leaders, unlike Wagner, are practitioners or pastors testing and proving church growth principles on the field. Pastoral leaders such as Bill Hybels, Rick Warren, John Maxwell, Doug Murren, and Ed Young have grown churches that have become models of church growth. They have written books, led conferences, and taught seminars to eager audiences desiring to hear and see how church growth works in practice. Undoubtedly, the Church Growth Movement, with a generation of applied growth principles in operation, will turn to practitioners to learn how the principles might work in other settings." (63-64). Other examples include Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth.* 3rd edition revised by C. Peter Wagner, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990).; C. Peter Wagner, ed., with Win Arn ed., with and Elmer Towns, *Church Growth: State of the Art.* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1986).

As time went by we continued to learn from leaders in the Church Growth Movement, men like Rick Warren and Bill Hybels. In *Purpose Driven Church*[148] Warren advocates an approach to whole-church, Great Commission obedience by aiming at specific purposes,[149] one of which is discipleship.[150] While Warren obviously cares about Christian identity and experience,[151] the majority of his book is directed at purposes,[152] and how a church can achieve them, lending a distinctly programmatic feeling to his work—a feeling that influenced our own work, with an increased attentiveness to church programs and their excellence.[153] Hybels' influence was also felt in our young church plant as we became regular, faithful attendees of the Global Leadership Summit.[154] In fact, it was at one such a summit that I experienced a clear call from God to my next assignment: to leave Scotland and, along with my family, plant the church I now pastor—Aletheia Church in Boston, MA.

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148. Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

149. Warren lays out what he believes are the five New Testament purposes of the church: (1) Worship – "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Mt 22:37), (2) Ministry – "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt 22:39), (3) Evangelism – "go therefore and make disciples" (Mt 28:19), (4) Fellowship – "baptizing them" (Mt 28:19, identification with the Christian community), and (5) Discipleship – "teaching them to obey all that I command you" (Mt 28:20).

150. While his church, Saddleback Church, locates discipleship in the role of education, it is also clear that Saddleback values evangelism and the experience of God's presence.; Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church: Every Church Is Big in God's Eyes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 125.

151. The first his book makes it clear that he does care about these matters, describing leading a man to faith with tears, and a call from God to develop principles for church health. Warren, *Purpose-Driven,* 38, 43.

152. His books lay out "purposes," toward which actions and strategy must be marshaled, thus "Purpose-Driven," approach to his work.

153. Hybels defines a disciple across five experiential G's: "(1) Grace. A disciple has experienced grace (salvation) and is walking in grace, (2) Growth. A disciple is growing in his or her relationship with Christ, (3) Group. A disciple is vitally involved in some sort of Christian group, (4) Gifts. A disciple knows what his or her spiritual gifts are and uses them in ministry, (5) Good Stewardship. A disciple gives his or her time, talents, and resources to kingdom causes." Willow Creek Community Church. "Five G's." Accessed December 4, 2020. https://www.willowcreek.org/en/about/ways-to-belong/five-gs.

154. This annual conference was a chance for Hybels to export his best ideas, and marshal his gift of leadership for the global church. For more, see https://globalleadership.org/global-leadership-summit/.

As my time in Scotland continued, I was learning to lean further into the charismatic part of my spiritual family tree, so I quickly came upon the work of C. Peter Wagner. Wagner's influence in the Church Growth movement is hard to over-estimate.[155] One of fifty charter members of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization when it was formed in 1974, he later became a key figure through his prolific writing and teaching ministry in the field.[156] Through his leadership at Fuller Theological Seminary, a Doctor of Ministry program in church growth was founded. And one of Wagner's most important—and most controversial—contributions to the Church Growth Movement was his transformative embrace of the growing charismatic movement. While at Fuller he fueled a new field of research and a new source of evangelistic and church growth success—namely, signs and wonders[157]—helping to legitimate the Modern Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement (MPCM)[158]. It is by this connection that I came to know of Wagner, as he was also an adjunct faculty for the various ministry schools of my own movement of churches and ministries, Every Nation.

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155. See Stetzer, Ed. 2020. "C. Peter Wagner (1930-2016), Some Thoughts on His Life and Passing." The Exchange | A Blog by Ed Stetzer. Accessed March 4. https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2016/october/in-memory-of-c-peter-wagner.html.; CBN News. 2016. "Apostolic Leader and Authority on Church Growth C. Peter Wagner, Dies." CBN News. October 25. http://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/us/2016/october/apostolic-leader-and-authority-on-church-growth-c-peter-wagner-dies.

156. "In 1986 Wagner was the primary editor of Church Growth: State of the Art, a mini-encyclopedia and reference book about the Church Growth Movement. In 1987 he wrote a brief theological treatment of the movement in his book Strategies for Church Growth." Rainer, *Church Growth,* 59.

157. For example, in partnership with Wimber, he offered a class at Fuller Theological Seminary called, "MC510: Signs, Wonders and Church Growth," where he taught and Wimber demonstrated what would later be called "Power Evangelism," by praying for students after the lecture was over.

158. I do not mean here to credit these two with the rise of the Modern Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement (MPCM), only to note that their influence was an important part of its rise. For a history of the rise of the MPCM, see: Stanley Burgess, *Christian Peoples of the Spirit: A Documentary History of Pentecostal Spirituality from the Early Church to the Present.* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2011).; Vinson Synan. *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdemans, 1997).; Vinson Synan, *Spirit-Empowered Christianity in the 21st Century*. (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma, 2011).

The resources of the MPCM connected to discipleship are very practical,[159] being especially concerned with spiritual experience of various kinds (charismatic spiritual gifts,[160] and powerful prayer,[161] for example.) John Wimber, a friend of Wagner's and the founder of *The Vineyard* movement of churches took this a step further by using the practice of charismatic gifts (healing, prophecy, etc.) not merely as a key evangelistic strategy,[162] but as something into which Christians must be discipled[163] —a belief now embraced by whole movements of churches and ministries.[164] This fusion of the practical call to make disciples with the experience of the charismatic gifts[165] was another step in my own understanding of discipleship—a thing that

159. Pentecostalism (like the Weslyan-Holiness tradition that preceded it) was birthed out of a desire to advance missions *and* deep spiritual experience. See Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdemans, 1997).

160. C. Peter Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1982).

161. Mike Bickle, *Passion for Jesus* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 1993).

162. John Wimber, *Power Evangelism.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 1986).

163. Wimber, *Power Evangelism,* 206.

164. This includes numerous theologians, practitioners finding themselves downstream from the charismatic convictions expressed by Wimber and his movement. These include such authors and professors as Dr. Wayne Grudem, and Dr. Jack Deere, along with movements that C. Peter Wagner catalogued in his controversial volume, *Churchquake!: How the New Apostolic Reformation is Shaking Up the Church as We Know it.* (Regal, 1999). Movements stemming from this stream include Every Nation Churches and Ministries, Antioch Ministries, Sovereign Grace, Newfrontiers, Hillsong, and even Bethel (Redding, CA) just to name a few. For more on these connections, see: David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements: How God Is Redeeming A Lost World.* (WIGTake Resources LLC, 2004).

165. I recognize that the MPCM was not the first movement of Christian history to emphasize an internal experience of the Holy Spirit. The history of this movement cannot here be fully considered, but has been catalogued by myself and others elsewhere. See M. Adam Mabry, "The Function of the Charismata in the Early Church and Modern Missions," *The Function of the Charismata in the Early Church and Modern Missions* (dissertation, RTS.edu, 2015), accessed November 16, 2020, https://rts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Maybry_Adam_Thesis_20160413.pdf.; Vinson Synan, "The Origins of the Pentecostal Movement." in The Origins of the Pentecostal Movement, April 17, 2006; available from http://www.oru.edu/library/special_collections/holy_spirit_research_center/pentecostal_history.php#origins; Internet; accessed September 10, 2015.

cannot separate hard work from deep spirituality.[166] With such practical, spiritual practices in hand, I went about my duties as a young missionary church planter aggressively.

Yet, my time in Scotland was not only one of happy productivity. There were also moments of deep pain. Pain that, with the benefit of hindsight, may have been connected to a disintegrated approach to discipleship that had not yet occurred to me but marked the church we were planting. For instance, while our staff teams in Edinburgh worked hard, our love for one another was shallow. And while our processes were clear, our disciples were not as spiritually or emotionally healthy as hoped.[167] I later discovered that anemic spiritual formation was also the experience of the best church-growth practitioners,[168] leaving some to conclude that a movement laudably driven by a desire to fulfill the Great Commission may inadvertently forestall a disciple's spiritual formation[169] by an over-emphasis on process and an under-emphasis on rich theology and spirituality.

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166. This was also formative to the founders of Every Nation (the movement of churches to which I belong). See Rice Broocks and Steve Murrel, *The Purple Book: Biblical Foundations for Making Disciples.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004). Here, a whole chapter is devoted to "The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts," very early in the book. In churches associated with their movement, Every Nation, experiences to facilitate the realities described in this chapter are curated regularly.

167. "Involvement in church activities does not predict or drive long-term spiritual growth. Although [Willow Creek's 'Reveal'] study showed some increase in spiritual behaviors (e.g., tithing, evangelism, and serving), there was very little correlation between levels of participation in church activities and spiritual attitudes (increasing love for God and for other people). People with greater involvement in church programs did not express a greater love for God than people who were less involved in the same programs. Thus, involvement in church activities alone made no direct impact on spiritual growth." Boubakar Sanou, "Toward a Biblical Model of Discipleship." Conference Proceeding, *The Journal of Adventist Missional Studies* 12, Number 2:8 (2016): 76-85.

168. This was, in part, a conclusion drawn by the *Reveal* study done by Willow Creek Church. "We made a mistake [again, quoting Hawkins]. What we should have done when people crossed the line of faith and become Christians, we should have started telling people and teaching people that they have to take responsibility to become 'self feeders.' We should have gotten people, taught people, how to read their Bibles ..., how to do the spiritual practices much more aggressively on their own."; Greg Hawkins, *Reveal: Where Are You?* (Willow Creek Association, 2007) 58.

169. Mark Galli, "Galli: Am I Growing Yet?," *ChristianityToday.com* (Christianity Today, October 25, 2007), last modified October 25, 2007, accessed November 16, 2020, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/octoberweb-only/143-43.0.html.

In sum, this period of my development was marked by a flurry of activity. To think of it now is a bit of blur, but as a young man, I set off across the sea with my wife and newborn baby. We helped plant two churches, and we birthed a campus ministry. I ran internships, art departments, and hosted mission trips, all while trying everything I was reading. Yet, all this activity did not have the universally positive effect of deeply rooting a people in a theological identity, nor forming a deep spirituality. And it was this revelation that marked a turning point in my own development—a turn back toward orthodoxy.

On Being and Doing

It would be inaccurate to say that I stopped all the doing one day and began to reflect about being. However, all the restless doing did bring me to my first real crisis of faith, forcing me to confront myself and what it meant to *be* a Christ-follower. While I was busy rushing around building the church apparatus of good discipleship programs, I was ignorant of a major presupposition that soon came crashing into my consciousness—that all my programs assumed others were interested in being disciples of Jesus, or at least checking out the church. But what if one built such things in a culture that thought following Jesus to be the least sensible thing one could possibly do? I did not have a good answer to that question, but when I helped build it and they did not come, my cluelessness briefly plunged me into a dark night of the soul. For me, rescue did not come in some profound spiritual experience, but in robust, apologetically-sound, Reformed theology.

At what I now understand to be the first swells of the young, restless, and Reformed movement,[170] I stumbled upon men like Mark Driscoll, Matt Chandler, and Tim Keller around 2007. While I had been deeply shaped by the teachings of John Piper,[171] it was only later, in this hour of need, that my mind was re-awakened to robust, formational works of theology as a way to approach Christian identity.[172] Devouring hundreds of sermons from the men above, I began to see that the work of disciple-making could only be as fruitful as the work to theologically form a disciple's identity. So, I set about shoring up my own. At this time, Tim Keller's *The Reason for God* was particularly important for me.[173] While many others have critically engaged with this book,[174] for me it represented the integration of a deeply rooted theological identity with a commitment to engaging the culture and one's community. And this book was part of my decision to begin seminary at Reformed Theological Seminary, which exposed me to more classics of the Reformed tradition that helpfully shaped my ways of thinking. Books like *Knowing God*, which unite the activity of being well-established in the faith with the self-

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170. For an introduction to this movement, see Collin Hansen, *Young, Restless, Reformed: A Journalist's Journey with the New Calvinists* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).; Collin Hansen, "Young, Restless, Reformed: Calvinism Is Making a Comeback—and Shaking up the Church.," *Christianity Today*, September 22, 2008, accessed November 23, 2020, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/september/42.32.html.

171. Specifically, his startlingly clear insight that "God is most glorified in me when I am most satisfied in Him," was a key foundation stone laid in my soul early after becoming a Christian. See John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Colorado Spring, CO: Multnomah, 1986).

172. "Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. eBut, while joined by many bonds, which one precedes and brings forth the other is not easy to discern." John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I. i. 1.

173. Tim Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2009).

174. Tim Challies, "Book Review - 'The Reason for God' by Tim Keller," Tim Challies, last modified February 12, 2008, accessed November 23, 2020, https://www.challies.com/book-reviews/book-review-the-reason-for-god-by-tim-keller/.; Trevin Wax, "Book Review: The Reason for God," *The Gospel Coalition*, last modified May 6, 2008, accessed November 23, 2020, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/book-review-the-reason-for-god/.; William D Dennison, "The Reason for God: A Review by William D. Dennison," *Banner of Truth USA*, last modified July 2, 2013, accessed November 23, 2020, https://banneroftruth.org/us/resources/book-review-resources/2009/the-reason-for-god-a-review-by-william-d-dennison/.

understanding of a rich theological identity[175] became commonplace in my thinking, along with others.[176] Helped by such authors and leaders, I found fresh footing upon which to engage in the practices of disciple-making, more firmly rooted in biblical identity.

As I finished my time in Scotland, it became clear that it was now time to begin thinking toward the future—the new church God was calling me to plant. And for that task, I engaged with more authors and leaders on how to instantiate this fusion of identity and activity—a fusion that I hoped would be a part of the church I would come to pastor. Recalling that fateful night at the Global Leadership Summit when this calling was first awakening within me, I re-engaged the teaching of the Church Growth movement, and encountered the writings of a new generation of its leaders.[177]

Beginning the New Church

After it began in the mind of God in the unsearchable depths of eternity, Aletheia began in mine in 2008. I vividly remember sitting up in bed, long after my wife had fallen asleep, with a mission statement coming off my pen and into my journal that contained three important words: truth, grace, and change. Aletheia would exist to make disciples who bring the truth, grace, and changing power of the gospel for the glory of God and the good of all people. This sentence is significant to this thesis-project for two reasons: First, because it introduces a third category into my years-long search for a wholistic form of discipleship, and second because it

175. J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (InterVarsity Press: Downer's Grove, IL, 1973).

176. This literature review is too narrow in its scope for me to catalogue all those who have influenced me deeply. But in my first seminary years, the writings of John Frame and Wayne Grudem, specifically sharpened my theological and apologetic skills.

177. Keller helpfully categorizes different generations of church growth books/materials. See *Center Church,* 17-19.

has been the consistent mission of the church I now pastor. As to the first matter, I can only credit John Frame for this triad. Frame has famously invoked three perspectives across all his works—the normative (control), the situational (authority), and the existential (presence).[178] His approach is easy to map onto Aletheia's values of truth, grace, and change, and easy to see in the three discipleship areas with which this thesis-project is concerned: identity, activity, and spirituality. Ever in the background of my thought, other more practical matters did come to the foreground, as ideas alone do not plant churches.

So, I set about re-entering the world of church discipleship praxis, and once again came upon the work of Thom Rainer in he and Eric Geiger's book *Simple Church.*[179] Seeking to correct the same problem Coleman was concerned with five decades earlier,[180] these authors warn against a dependence on programs disconnected from the whole-church mission to make disciples. They then lay out a process by which a church might develop such a whole-church mission—a mission that fulfills the great commission of making disciples.[181] Finding their emphasis on clarity, alignment, and focus helpful, I imagined a church that would be unified and clear around the mission to which I felt God calling.

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178. I owe much to Dr. Frame, who first introduced a mutliperspectival epistemology to me, and from whom I have gained the capacity to see such perspectives almost everywhere. See John Frame, *A Theology of Lordship, vol.1-4* (P&R: Philadelphia, PA, 2008).; John Frame, *Systematic Theology* (P&R: Philadelphia, PA, 2013), 14-35.

179. Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples.* (B&H Books: Nashville, TN, 2011).

180. Rainer and Geiger, *Simple Church,* 10-35.

181. Rainer says, for example, "This book will help you design a simple process of discipleship in your church." Rainer and Geiger, *Simple Church*, 10.

At this time, another critically important work emerged, Dr. Steve Murrell's *WikiChurch,* which lays out a process that has shaped this author's own views quite extensively.[182] The founder of Victory Church in Manila, Philippines, his church has grown to hundreds of thousands, planting new churches in every Asian nation in the twenty-five years following its inception, with discipleship as its specific strategy.[183] In some ways, Murrell's book is a distillation of Coleman's ideas.[184] Through a simple process called "the four E's," Murrell and his associated movement of churches has expanded primarily through discipleship, and provide a helpful heuristic for my own understanding of wholistic discipleship. In a sentence designed to intentionally rebuff the "church growth" focus, he writes, "We have found that if we simply focus on making disciples who are equipped and empowered to make other disciples, then health, strength, and growth happen naturally."[185] Therefore, he advocates a total focus on discipleship, which he defines as (1) engaging culture and community with the gospel, (2) establishing Christians in the Scriptures, spiritual disciplines, and spiritual family, (3) equipping disciples with the basic skills to make more disciples, and (4) empowering Christians to go make disciples, removing any unnecessary barriers that might get in their way. The first principle—that a church should be totally focused on discipleship—sank in very early on. But, it would be a few years before the four E's would decisively shape my thinking.

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182. Steve Murrell, *WikiChurch: Making Discipleship Engaging, Empowering, and Viral* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2011).

183. Warren Bird. 2017. "Philippines: Victory Megachurch Building on Discipleship." OutreachMagazine.com. July 24. https://outreachmagazine.com/features/14125-philippines-victory-megachurch-building-on-discipleship.html.

184. This author owes much to Murrell's contribution, as it is my own movement of churches as well. Specifically, his "4E's of Discipleship: Engage, Establish, Equip, and Empower," will become a key framework for the development of this thesis-project.

185. Murrell, *WikiChurch,* 8.

In short order, the theological influences of the Reformed movement and the programmatic influences of the Church Growth movement, combined with some of the spiritual practices of the MPCM in the planting of Aletheia Church. Murrell's values lay behind our own. Church growth wisdom informed our programs. Keller's book, *The Reason for God* was our first teaching series. And dependance on the *charismata* marked many of our smaller, less formal interactions, giving life to this new, growing work. The church grew rapidly, and within a few years, a church of 500 people stood in the unlikeliest of places—equidistant between Harvard and MIT. Yet, as the church grew past its infancy, a longing for more spiritual depth was increasing, and the faint echoes of Henri Nouwen's voice kept resounding in my mind.

Reaping a Harvest, Rediscovering Spirituality

As an achiever, I'm not innately drawn to the writings of the Christian mystics. I find the word "spirituality" distasteful, I don't enjoy long prayer meetings, fasting is burdensome, and "waiting on the Lord" is difficult. Yet, I have come to recognize that this third dimension—the dimension of spiritual presence and depth is *sine qua non* to Christian discipleship. And I have had to learn that through leading the church.[186] Around the same time that Coleman penned his famous work, another evangelical leader was equally concerned about a lack of discipleship, but from a slightly different perspective. Richard Foster was concerned that "there was an abysmal ignorance of how we grow in grace, entering into ever fuller and deeper Christ-likeness. I penned *Celebration of Discipline* in response to this crying need."[187] Foster's book, which became—and

186. Detail of my first real encounter with such matters can be found in: Adam Mabry *The Art of Rest* (The Good Book Company: London, UK, 2018).

187. Richard Foster, *A Celebration of Discipline* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2018), 4.

remains—wildly popular, seeks to correct an anemic understanding of the god-ward disciplines of a disciple, and the way they work in spiritual formation. Concerned that church practices were increasing the disintegration with which this thesis-project is concerned,[188] he advocated spiritual disciplines that, "can be for us a means of receiving God's grace. They put us in a place where we can experience inner transformation as a gift."[189]

Foster's work was paralleled by men like Dallas Willard and Henri J.M. Nouwen, who also desire to see a more wholistic vision of Christian discipleship by means of a deepened spirituality.[190] Nouwen, a Catholic, has had a large influence beyond the church of Rome, arguing forcefully yet with a humble transparency that we must understand ourselves as God's beloved sons,[191] calling his readers to see themselves through the eyes of God,[192] by "entering into the inner sanctuary of [one's] own being where God has chosen to dwell."[193] Such self-understanding of one's identity as called into the family of God is central to much of Nouwen's writing. In this way, Nouwen would apply spiritually a renewed understanding of theological identity—an approach this author has found helpful.

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188. "Richard discerned a pattern: that people were *trying* rather than *training* to become like Jesus, that they held a myopic rather than a synoptic view of the path to Christlikeness, and that they were scattered rather than gathered. How to address those needs became a focus of Richard's work."; "Richard J. Foster Bio," *Renovare*, accessed November 16, 2020, https://renovare.org/people/richard-foster/bio.

189. Richard J. Foster,"Seven Pitfalls of Spiritual Disciplines," *Renovare*, accessed November 16, 2020, https://renovare.org/articles/spiritual-disciplines-seven-pitfalls.

190. Christopher A. Hall, "How to Get the DNA of Jesus," *Christianity Today,* February 20, 2014, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/march/how-to-get-dna-of-jesus.html.

191. One's sonship is focus of his powerful book, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming* (New York, NY: Image Books, 2013).

192. Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, 17.

193. Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, 18.

One finds similar interests in the writings of the late Dallas Willard. A philosopher, he shares Foster's emphasis on internal transformation and the practice of spiritual disciplines,[194] yet with the abstract bent of a philosopher.[195] Caring deeply about discipleship, he is troubled by the inauthenticity of what passes for Christianity—a disintegration of activity, identity, and spirituality. In an interview with Relevant Magazine, he explains:

> The greatest challenge the church faces today is to be authentic disciples of Jesus. And by that I mean they're learning from Him how to live their life, as He would live their life if He were they. So that means, whatever I am, whoever I am, I take Him into my whole life as my Lord. Lord means that He's my teacher. Another way of putting this is to say that our greatest challenge is to recover Jesus the Teacher. You know, if you don't have a teacher you can't have a disciple. Disciples are just students. Unfortunately, it's a long and convoluted story, but roughly over the last two hundred years, Jesus as Teacher has simply disappeared. Whether Liberal or Conservative, it doesn't make any difference.[196]

Notice the way Willard understands discipleship— "to take him into my whole life as my Lord. Lord means my teacher…" In the long quote above, he alludes to the way we in the West have come to misunderstand what "Jesus my Teacher," means, reducing him to school instructor instead of my whole-life rabbi leading "my moment-by-moment existence as a holy calling or appointment from God."[197] Willard eschews programmatic church activities as the primary means by which disciples are made, emphasizing the critical importance of personal transformation through real, practiced, mystical union with God. With piercing conviction, he

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194. Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: How God Changes Lives* (HarperCollins: New York, NY, 1988).

195. A simple example of this difference of emphasis with Foster can be seen by comparing their respective books on spiritual disciplines. Foster's book is a manual on how to practice the disciplines, where Willard's book is a biblical/philosophical treatise on the disciplines themselves as important to Christian identity and formation. In an appendix to *The Spirit of the Disciplines,* Willard approaches discipleship in a similar, identity-concerned way, offering an apologetic for understanding Christian identity *as* that of a disciple.; Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1999), 345-383.

196. Dallas Willard and Keith Giles, "Subversive Interview - Part 1", June 8, 2004, https://relevantmagazine.com/god/649-subversive-interview-dallas-willard-part-1/.

197. Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1998), 94.

reveals how often a pastor's desire for perfect discipleship system springs from an avoidance of the messy experience of deep, internal transformation.[198] In a conversation between Willard and Foster, Foster himself pointed to this desire to integrate profound spirituality by saying how Willard "works on the whole self, and how the whole self works."[199] Willard summarizes this general concern:

> As we have noted, Post-WW II evangelicalism does not naturally conduct its converts and adherents into a life of discipleship, nor into pervasive Christlikeness of character—with the routine, easy obedience that it entails. What this most recent version of evangelicalism lacks is a theology of discipleship. Specifically, it lacks a clear teaching on how what happens at conversion continues on without break into an ever fuller life in the Kingdom of God. How, to cite Paul's language, does "the grace of God that brings salvation" discipline us, train us, in such a way that we turn from "ungodliness and worldly lust" to live lives that are "sensible, righteous, and godly in the present world"? (Titus 2:11-14; cp. Phil. 2:12-15) How is it, exactly, that he who gave himself for us also "redeems us from all iniquity and purifies for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds"? (vs. 14; cp. Eph. 2:10) To such questions contemporary evangelicalism has no answer.[200]

Authors like Foster and Willard lend richness and texture to my understanding of the possibility of Christian spirituality which has been all-too-often lacking in any discussion about Christian discipleship. Their insights into the experience of one's identity have shaped my own understanding of the discipleship path, as will become evident later. From them, two important contributions to this thesis-project have been derived: a depth and texture to this third category of

198. Dallas Willard, *The Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2013), 15.

199. Dallas Willard and Richard J Foster, "Christian Disciplines as a Means of Grace: A Conversation Between Richard J. Foster and Dallas Willard," *The Dallas Willard Center*, accessed November 16, 2020, http://dallaswillardcenter.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Christiandisciplinesasameanstograce.pdf.

200. Gerald R. McDermott and Dallas Willard, "Discipleship," in *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 253.

spirituality, and a greater vision for how that category can and should integrate and interact with the other two.

Another author with similar concerns is Eugene Peterson. While the breadth of his life and work is too large to be fully considered here,[201] I can note the ways his work has impacted the work of this thesis-project. In *Working the Angles,* a diatribe against the loss of pastoral vocation in Evangelicalism, Peterson expresses real anger at the way modern ministry has become an activity patterned after the world's shopkeepers rather than the pastoral calling revealed in Scripture.[202] While the basic activities of preaching, teaching, and administration are necessary in every pastoral vocation, it is privately working "the small angles" of "prayer, Scripture, and spiritual direction" that "gives shape and integrity to the daily work of pastors."[203] In this book, he reminds the reader that attending to his relationship with God is the central requirement of pastoral ministry—in other words, he connects the God-ward and world-ward poles of discipleship. By working these unseen angles the pastor does what only he can do for his people: he attends to God so that he may help them attend to God as well. Peterson's great desire for himself and others is the real experience of the God the Bible, in all of life,[204] and what pastor wouldn't want that? His axiom, often spoken over his own children, "God loves you, he's on your side, he's coming after you, he's relentless,"[205] is a beautiful challenge to practitioners like

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201. For a helpful biography of Peterson, see Winn Collier, *A Burning in My Bones: The Authorized Biography of Eugene H. Peterson, Translator of The Message* (Grand Rapids, MI: WaterBrook, 2021).

202. Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdemans, 1987), KL 54.

203. Peterson, *Working the Angles*.

204. In *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship for an Instant Society* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP, 2019) he stresses that discipleship isn't an experience that zaps you all at once, but instead the actualization of virtue and holiness through presence with God and obedience.

205. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, 10.

me—who are often clinical, abstract, and programmatic—to keep a wholesome experience of God's loving presence ever at the center. In a sentence, Peterson saw discipleship primarily as a relational pilgrimage with others toward God.[206] This very relational concern can be felt in *The Message*—a work of translating the Bible into a more colloquial tone for his congregation.[207] Indeed, his work is a testament to the possibility of integrating at least the spirituality and identity dimensions of discipleship. Yet, deeply suspicious of the ability of large churches to produce wholistic disciples, Peterson's insights serve as a warning and a challenge to the leaders of any rapidly growing ministry, mine included.

In fact, Peterson's deepest fears came true in the early life and ministry of Peter Scazzero, a story he tells in his best-selling book, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality.*[208] While good programming and sound theology were not a problem for Scazzero, the pastor of a large and growing urban church, their lack of integration within his own life was—particularly his emotional life. So, in his work on healthy spirituality, Scazerro is concerned, above all else, that Jesus' disciples inwardly actualize the shalom of God,[209] making it clear that we cannot grow as disciples if we are not experiencing discipleship and maturity at the level of our own emotions.[210] At a season in my own ministry life when activity was overwhelming, this book was a balm.[211]

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206. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction,* 18.

207. Eugene Peterson, *The Message* (NavPress: Colorado Springs, CO: 1993).

208. Scazerro tells this story in *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: It's Impossible to Be Spiritually Mature, While Remaining Emotionally Immature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 13-45.

209. Scazerro, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality,* 14.

210. This is the main point of *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality.*

211. I was particularly helped by his application of his principles directly to the sphere of leadership. See Peter Scazerro, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader: How Transforming Your Inner-Life will Deeply Transform Your Church, Team, and the World.* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI, 2015).

Integration is not only the goal of these more mystical authors, but also of someone like Keller. In his *magnum opus,*[212] he offers his reader a "theological vision for ministry,"[213] —an outworking of his conviction that theological identity is the fount from which flows anything else a disciple or a church does. This is largely the concern of The Gospel Coalition, a coalition of churches, ministries, and individual Christians who understand themselves within the contours of a Reformed theological perspective, arguing that "out of that distinct identity, we should sacrificially serve neighbors and even enemies, working for the flourishing of people, both here and now, and in eternity."[214] Of course, it would be too simple to say that Keller is only concerned with a theological identity—his own success in ministry demonstrates that he clearly understands many of the best practices of the Church Growth Movement,[215] and the penetrating insights of those concerned with contemplative spirituality.[216]

Attempts at Integration

While a Reformed pastor like Keller predictably places a theological vision at the fountainhead of integrated discipleship, others within the Modern Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement have taken a different approach. As I am both Reformed *and* Charismatic, noting some of these attempts at integration is relevant to this thesis-project, insofar as their attempts

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212. Tim Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013).

213. Keller, *Center Church*, 18-19.

214. "Foundation Documents of The Gospel Coalition", accessed July 30, 2020, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/about/foundation-documents/

215. He acknowledges this. See Keller, *Center Church*, 18-20.

216. Keller, *Center Church.,* 367.

influence this thesis-project. Every Christian leader and pastor mentioned in this chapter is concerned with how those under his influence experience their lives—indeed the borders between activity, identity, and spirituality are semi-permeable. Within the MPCM, however, no movement has worked harder nor been more successful than Australian-born Hillsong at leveraging a largely Pentecostal approach to spirituality and the best insights of the Church Growth movement toward discipleship.[217] While some have criticized this movement (and others like it) for a perceived over-dependance on such experiences,[218] their size and influence has helped to normalize the use of these experiences in the Western church as part of a larger discipleship process.[219]

The Modern Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement (MPCM) is rooted in the history of the church springing from the Asuza Street revival that began on April 14, 1906. Since that revival, experiences with the Holy Spirit have indelibly marked this movement's approaches to discipleship. MPCM churches and ministries have produced voluminous resources instructing

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217. "I see a Church whose altars are constantly filled with repentant sinners responding to Christ's call to salvation. Yes, the Church that I see is so dependent on the Holy Spirit that nothing will stop it nor stand against it; a Church whose people are unified, praying and full of God's Spirit." *Brian Houston,* "The Church I See." "About." 2020. The Vision of Hillsong Church | About. Accessed March 5. https://hillsong.com/vision/.

218. Clint Bryan, "Hillsong's Global Appeal, Explained by Sociologists." ChristianityToday.com. Christianity Today. July 30. https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/january-web-only/hillsongs-global-appeal-explained-by-sociologists.html.

219. The practices of Hillsong to lean heavily into the power of experiences to move people along in a process of discipleship is one that has been heavily borrowed by other large churches such at Life.church, and Elevation Church, two more of the largest churches in the United States. They have even set up an online platform to share resources to help other churches use this experience-driven approach. See "Resources and Training," Open.Church. July 30, 2020. http://www.open.church.

Christians on experiencing God's presence,[220] the "supernatural,"[221] and a blessed life.[222] The fastest growing segment of Christianity, the expansion is unparalleled in the history of missions,[223] MPCM emphasizes the power of the Spirit to actualize the promises and presence of God. After all, long before the Spirit was a theme of doctrine, He was a fact in the experience of the community[224]—a fact that has radically important implications for such churches today (like Aletheia).

Conclusions

An inevitable consequence of a literature review like this is that it necessarily under-represents the views of the authors. Therefore, a bit of nuance is in order. I do not mean to suggest that I am the first to desire or work toward more wholistic discipleship. Likely, this concern is shared by every one of the authors with whom I have interacted. For example, Coleman offers a bevy of prescriptions on activity, all of which are deeply related to theological identity,[225] and he certainly cared to integrate discipleship into the larger understanding of

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220. See for example Francis Chan, *Forgotten God: Reversing our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009).; Bill Johnson, *When Heaven Invades Earth* (Lake Mary, FL: Destiny Image, 2005).; Sam Storms, *The Beginners Guide to Spiritual Gifts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Bethany House, 2013).

221. See for example Sam Storms, *Practicing the Power* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017).; R.T. Kendall, *Holy Fire* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2014).; C. Peter Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow* (Bloomington, MN: Chosen Books, 1979).; Bruce Bugbee, *What You Do Best in the Body of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009).

222. See Robert Morris, *The Blessed Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Bethany House, 2016).; Robert Morris, *Beyond Blessed* (New York, NY: FaithWords, 2019).

223. Allan Anderson, "Global Pentecostalism," A Paper presented at the Wheaton Theology Conference, 3 April 2015, Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL.

224. Eduard Schweizer, "πνεύμα," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed., Kittel, Gerhard, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 6: 396.

225. "The crucial thing, of course, is their own spiritual experience. Before they are turned loose from our control, they need to be thoroughly established in the faith that overcomes the world." Coleman, *The Master Plan,* 105.

orthopraxy itself.[226] Scazerro is primarily interested in Christians experiencing deep, internal emotional health, precisely because he wants their activity to be fruitful[227] and mature in their Christian identity.[228] Rainer advocates a simple, clear, reproducible process of discipleship activities out of a desire for real transformation and spiritual vitality.[229] Such insights give hope to my own desires—to see a wholistic discipleship program be and become far more than a mere program, in fact, a way of life.

This thesis-project catalogues my own experience managing and leading various iterations of increasingly integrated discipleship processes at Aletheia Church. It should now be clear that the authors discussed in this literature review have been my guides, mentors, and coaches, and that organizing, synthesizing and refining their insights has formed the discipleship heuristic I am now proposing. So, all this reflection brings us to the present moment, and the present question—how can a church like Alethia program, promulgate, or otherwise pull-off a wholistic vision of discipleship? To help answer that question, I propose the following chart:

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226. Coleman, *The Master Plan,* 12.

227. "Emotionally Healthy Spirituality… is designed to help people experience beneath-the-surface transformation —spiritually and emotionally. Why? Because deeply changed people have a more powerful and more sustainable impact on the world." Scazerro, *Emotionally Healthy,* 10.

228. Scazerro, *Emotionally Healthy,* 60.

229. Rainer, *Simple Church,* 28.

Figure 4. Wholistic Discipleship Chart

GOD (Coram Deo)		
IDENTITY (Orthodoxy)	**SPIRITUALITY** (Orthopathy)	**ACTIVITY** (Orthopraxy)
Followers of Jesus	**Creational** The Spirit regenerates, reorients, and renews.	**Engage** culture, community, and non-Christians
Family of Jesus	**Animational** The Spirit is giving gifts, fruit, presence, and power.	**Establish** believers in the faith, in spiritual disciplines, and spiritual family
Fishers with Jesus		**Equip** disciples with basic skills to make disciples
Free to be like Jesus	**Eschatological** "Here as it is in Heaven."	**Empower** disciples to be and make disciples
THE WORLD (They will know you are my disciples…)		

This chart illustrates my conviction that a disciple is one whose identity, activity, and spirituality have been and are being re-integrated before God and the world, by faith in the gospel, and discipleship is the process of this reintegration. Following Steve Murrel, I propose that activities associated with wholistic discipleship can be represented by the four E's above—engaging culture and community, establishing disciples in the word, the disciplines, and the Church, equipping them with the tools necessary to make disciples, and empowering them to go and make disciples. Furthermore, drawing on the insights of Coleman, Keller, Willard, and others, I propose that a disciple's identity can be well represented with four F's—a follower of Jesus, a

member of the family of God, a fisher with Christ, and one freed to be like him. Finally, drawing on Willard, Scazerro, Foster, Peterson, many within the MPCM, and my own Ph.D. work, I propose that the irreducible deepening dimension of spirituality might be understood by leaning into three movements of the Spirit's life in a believer—one whose role is creational, animational, and eschatological.[230] I must admit, however, that the experiental domain of orthopathy is notoriously difficult to measure, and even more difficult to plan out.[231] Therefore, I have placed dotted lines around the spirituality column, as a visual nod to this fact. While I fully expect that further research and reflection upon these three domains will yield better categories than my own, one must begin somewhere. And, by avoiding the vaporous, difficult-to-quantify domain of spirituality, I believe we run a greater risk—the continued disintegration of the identity, activity, and spirituality of Christ's disciples. Finally, the dipolar audiences before whom discipleship is experienced are represented as God above and the world below. Therefore, with convictions and categories in place, let us now examine the thesis-project itself.

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230. I here draw upon my Ph.D. research. See M. Adam Mabry, "Christotelic Pneumatology: A Christ-Oriented Approach Pneumatology for the Life of the Church" (dissertation, The University of Aberdeen, anticipated publication 2021).

231. "*Orthopathy* literally means right passion. The word was coined by Dr Richard Mouw. There is also a hint in the writings of the Jewish author Abraham Heschel who said the prophets embodied the divine pathos, that is, what God cares for."; Paul R. Stevens, "Living Theologically: Toward a Theology of Christian Practice," *Themelios 20, no. 3* (1995): 6.

CHAPTER 4

WHOLISTIC DISCIPLESHIP: A PROJECT

Introduction

The purpose of this thesis-project is two-fold: to develop a biblically faithful, theologically robust, and wholistically integrated understanding of discipleship as the fundamental purpose of the Church, *and* to implement that understanding effectively in a local church; in particular, the church I planted and have pastored in Boston since 2010, Aletheia. The first three chapters of this work, therefore, are not mere background to the project; they are the first part of it—creating a theologically robust, biblically faithful, and wholistic idea of disciples as human beings fully alive, fully integrated in their identity, activity and spirituality before God. Disciples are followers of Jesus, formed into his likeness as members of God's family, commissioned to make disciples in his kingdom (fishers of men), and freed by his Spirit to be all that human beings were created to be. This hard won understanding of discipleship, years in the making, is represented in the chart with which chapter three ended and chapter four will begin, a chart that defines discipleship at Aletheia Church.

The fourth and fifth chapters of this thesis-project fulfill the second half of its two-fold purpose: implementation. They answer the question, 'How was this understanding of discipleship developed and implemented in practice?' Because of the autobiographical nature of the literature review (chapter three), some aspects of that question have been addressed already. But the story of project implementation proper still lies ahead, as does evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of that implementation.

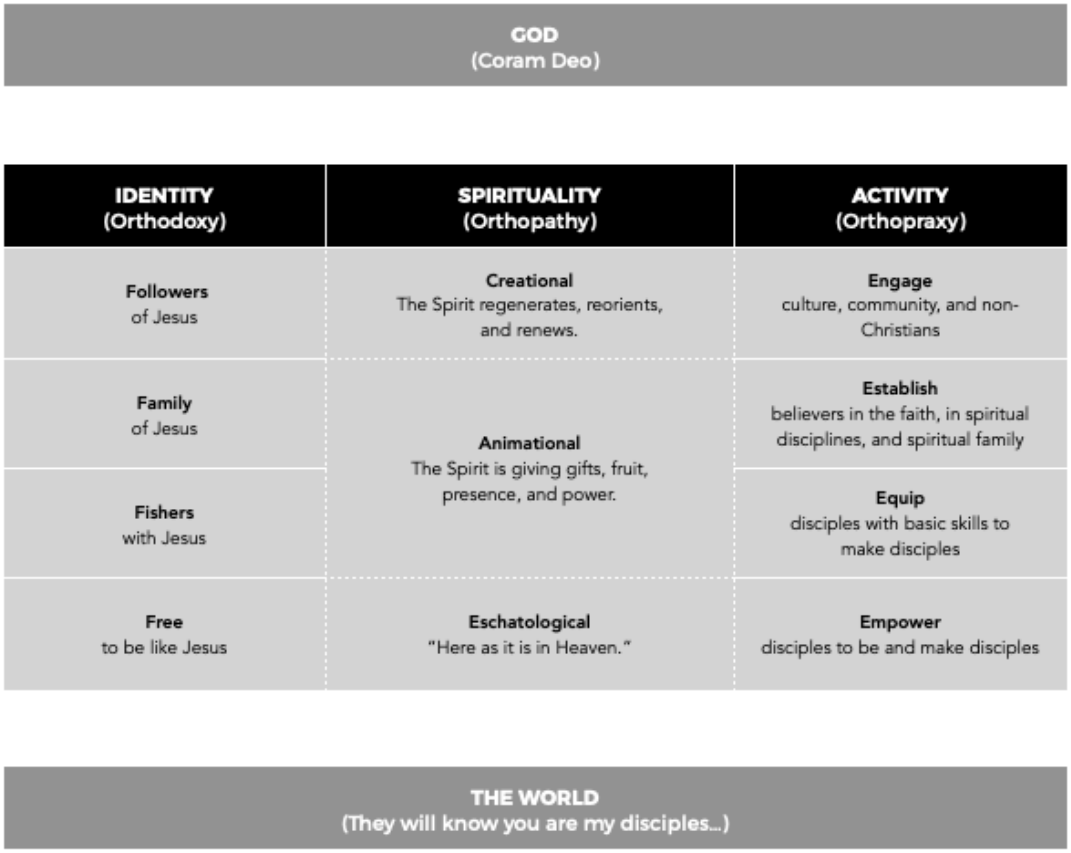
The basic shape of the process of implementation has been significantly influenced by the work of Richard Osmer, Professor of Mission and Evangelism at Princeton Theological Seminary.[232] His methodology, now standard in the discipline of practical theology, follows four steps: (1) The Descriptive Task of learning what is or has been going on, (2) The Interpretive Task of wisely interpreting that information, followed by (3) The Prophetic Task of describing what, according to Scripture and wisdom *should* be happening, and then (4) The Pragmatic Task of leading the church toward that end. These are the tasks which I undertook at Aletheia to develop and implement a wholistic, integrated approach to discipleship and provide a robust means for internal transformation of disciples *and* external renovation of the church. And, while the project of wholistic discipleship is still very much ongoing, the provisional conclusions so far discovered have been insightful to me, my church, and may be to others.

Framework Being Explored

A wholistic, integrated approach to discipleship takes seriously the identity, activity, and spirituality of a disciple of Jesus Christ, outlined in Scripture. Then, it seeks to instantiate such an approach in the life of the disciples *and* the local church. The chart below provides a basic, visual representation of the biblical theological work of chapter 2, influenced by the insights of chapter 3. This definition springs from bringing together the three domains of discipleship: identity, activity, and spirituality.

232. Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

Figure 4. Wholistic Discipleship



This wholistic approach to discipleship attempts to take seriously the God-ward and world-ward directionality of discipleship. This di-polar relationship will be measured by the degree to which this framework helps disciples act, identify, and experience life with God (e.g., prayerfulness, personal maturity, understanding of the Bible, a sense of God's presence) *before* the world (e.g., evangelistic activity and fruitfulness, leadership of a small group or a ministry team, multiplication of leadership).

Project Phases

Understanding discipleship in the ways proposed in this thesis-project will require any church or individual focus and intentionality, as it certainly has for us at Aletheia.

Furthermore, instantiating the changes in organizational and individual behavior will take time as well.[233] To give scaffold to such a process, this project will follow three major steps: reframe, reimagine, and renew.

- Reframe - Mapping onto the "Identity" perspective, this phase is marked by assessing and expanding one's understanding of discipleship. Particular emphasis will be placed on the theological understanding of who a disciple is in conversation with what disciples do.
- Reimagine - Mapping onto the "Activity" sphere, this phase guides one to think through the actions and ministries of the church along the lines of the newly framed vision for discipleship. Here, context will be taken into account.
- Renew - Mapping onto the "Spirituality" sphere, this final phase guides one to experience reality renewed by the first two phases. Particular emphasis will be given to intangible but important evidence of the Spirit's power and presence within the life of a disciple.

Phase 1: Reframe - Narrative and Principles

The first step to instantiating a wholistic vision and practice of discipleship begins by coming to terms with (a) what has been going on in the individual or church seeking to embrace the wholistic process, and (b) what the wholistic process is biblically, theologically, and principally. In this way, it concerns itself with the first two steps of Osmer's practical-theological methodology, the descriptive and interpretive tasks: discovering what is happening, and what should be happening instead.[234] We shall therefore take this approach with regard to Aletheia Church—the church I founded and am at present serving as the Senior Pastor.

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233. This is not a thesis-project about managing and leading organizational change, but for insights I highly recommend John Kotter, *Leading Change* (Harvard Business Review Press: Cambridge, MA, 2012).

234. Osmer, *Practical Theology,* KL 401, 982.

Narrative

Aletheia Church was planted in early 2011 with a handful of lay persons, two staff, and a desire to see a flourishing, disciple-making church arise in Boston. A value even before its inception,[235] discipleship was always at the heart of the vision, however imperfectly it was instantiated. Implementing many of the best practices of church planting at the time, Aletheia launched publicly in January 2011,[236] with the mission "to make disciples who bring the truth, grace, and changing power of the gospel for the glory of God and the good of all people."[237] Growing rapidly, however, the process of discipleship required clarification in at least three major iterations.

Discipleship Process Iteration 1: Gather and Scatter

In the early years of a church plant, processes are often frenetic and somewhat undefined, as the organization grows from dream to rapidly materializing reality. At that time, the discipleship process was explained as a rhythm. The idea was simply this: obedience to the great commission and the great commandment meant going out into the world / loving our neighbor (evangelism/missions) and experiencing the "with-ness" of Jesus / loving God. So, Aletheia viewed its process as a set of Godward actions and another set of world-ward actions, visually

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235. Aletheia Church is part of a global family of churches and ministries called Every Nation. Every Nation was birthed from a concern for church planting, campus ministry, and world missions. Its stated goal is "to plant Christ-centered, Spirit-empowered, socially-responsible churches and ministries in every nation." Led by a team of church planters and missionaries, its central concern has always been a very missionary one.

236. Within the last 30 years church planting in the western world has undergone a significant set of developments, such that there are now whole bodies of literature, research, conferences, and societies aimed at developing this field. See Daniel Im and Ed Stetzer, "Annotated Church Planting Bibliography," NewChurches.com, accessed December 5, 2017 <https://newchurches.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Anno-Bib-NCPlant1116.pdf>

237. "Heartbeat," Aletheia Church, accessed December 5, 2017 <http://www.aletheia.org/about/heartbeat/>

represented in this way:

Figure 5. Gather and Scatter

Godward Rhythm
Know Truth - Action: Conversion
Experience Grace - Action: Victory
Change - Action: Maturity
The Reason
To bring the truth, grace, and changing power of the gospel for the glory of God and the good of all people.
World-ward Rhythm
Teach Truth - Action: Proclamation
Show Grace - Action: Community
Lead Change - Action: Accountability

While the practices of the church looked common—small groups, Sunday gatherings, community service—the process that attempted to align these practices into a coherent discipleship track was somewhat obscure. As the church grew numerically, attendance in small groups did not follow.[238] The number of baptisms also did not track with attendance.[239] In other words, the process of becoming a follower of Jesus, in relationship with other followers of Jesus, who make followers of Jesus, was not working well. Certain marks of church planting success and growth were present, but nothing resembling the wholistic, viral spread of disciples that was desired.

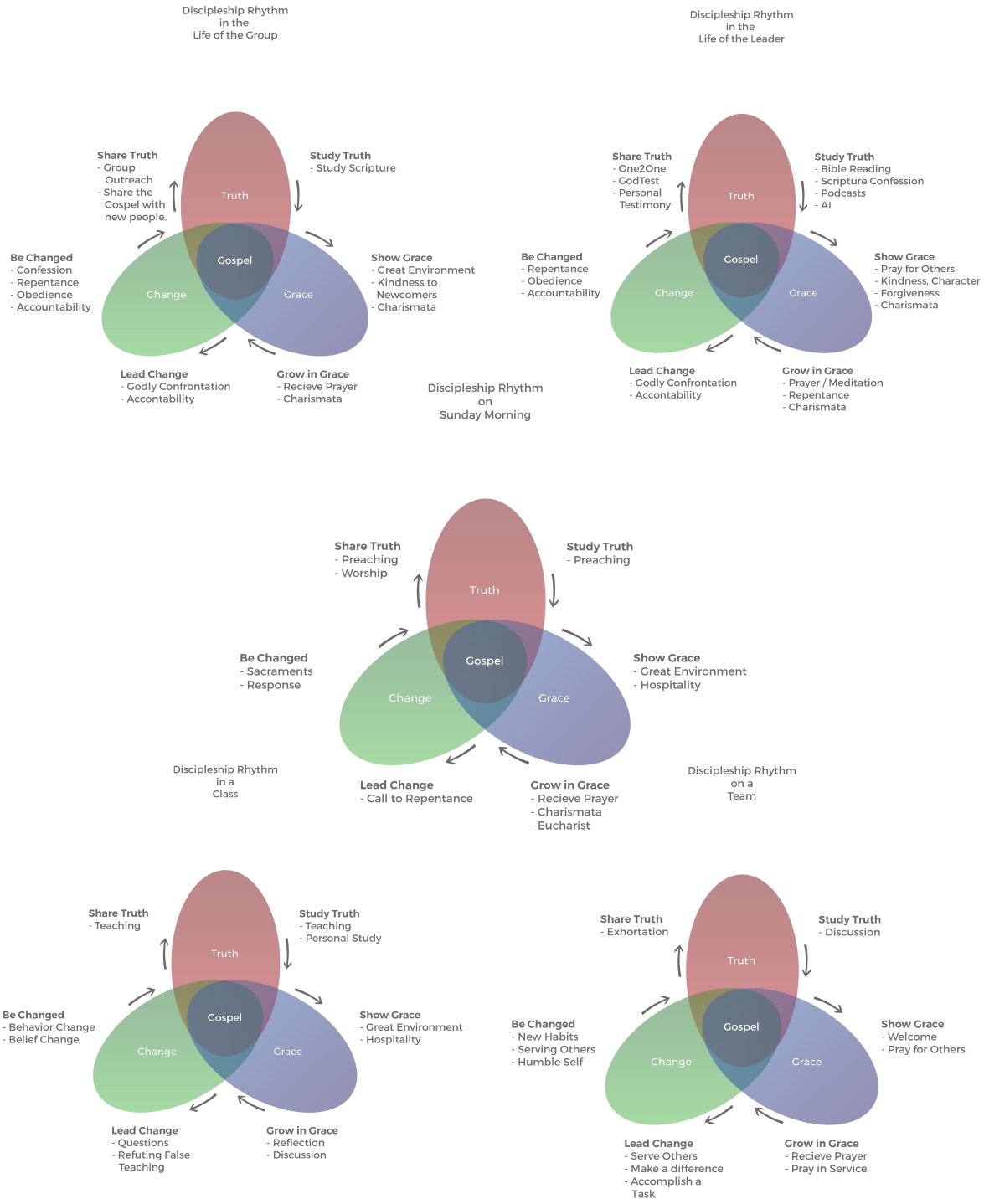
238. For instance, in the first three years of church life, when this process was in place, attendance grew at an annualized rate of 80% over three years. Yet, small group attendance tracked at roughly 25% of attendance. In year one (2011), average Sunday attendance (ASA) was 150, but group attendance (GA) was 41 (27.3%). In year two (2012), ASA was 210 but GA roughly 60 (28%). In year three (2013), ASA was 301, but GA was roughly 82 (27%). While this represents positive growth, it was not growth that ever significantly caught up to Sunday attendance.

239. In years, 1 through 3, baptisms as a percentage of ASA fell.

Discipleship Process Iteration 2: Gospel Rhythms

In response to the problem of growing Sunday attendance that was not tracking with group attendance or baptisms, in 2014, a new process was designed. While the mission statement of the church remained the same—to make disciples who bring the truth, grace, and changing power of the gospel for the glory of God and the good of all—the methodology changed. In this iteration, the idea was to explore and explain how to live out "gospel rhythms" of truth, grace, and change throughout all the activities of the church — groups, teams, gatherings, classes, and even individual leadership. This iteration of the discipleship process took very seriously the world-ward and God-ward di-polarity previously explained. But in seeking to emphasize these things, this new iteration ended up obfuscating discipleship with an overly-complex representation. Graphically, Aletheia discipleship strategy was represented like this:

Figure 6. Gospel Rhythms



Discipleship Process Iteration 3: Discipleship Rhythms

After implementing the previous model for 12-18 months, Aletheia saw little improvement. Not only did the complexity of the above process not help anything like wholistic discipleship occur, but it slowed down the growth in average Sunday attendance.[240] During the same time, the church saw little improvement in other metrics: group attendance,[241] group leadership development,[242] and baptisms.[243] By all counts, this new method was not working as hoped.

At this point (the beginning of 2016) the entire discipleship process went under review, once again. While there continued to be instances of discipleship success—conversion, leader development, group participation—they were instances rather than patterns experienced throughout the church. Furthermore, we were beginning to discover another problem. Our church, which was charismatic in theology and leadership, had not built any programmatic means to impart such teachings or experiences to our new disciples. This led to a charismatic

240. This may explain the slowed-down rate of attendance growth that year to only 17%. Of course, I recognize that there are many reasons churches do or do not grow. While we had surpassed the stickiest church growth barrier of 200, we were approaching the 500 barrier, so natural barriers to church growth may also have been at play. However, in conversation after conversation from this time, the confusing nature of this representation seemed to discourage those leaders upon whom every church depends to lead in the mission. And, in order to break through the 500 barrier, simplification/clarification of this process was required. For more on those known issues, see Timothy Keller, "Leadership and Church Size Dynamics: How Strategy Changes with Growth," *Senior Pastor Central*, accessed November 17, 2020, https://seniorpastorcentral.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Tim-Keller-Size-Dynamics.pdf.

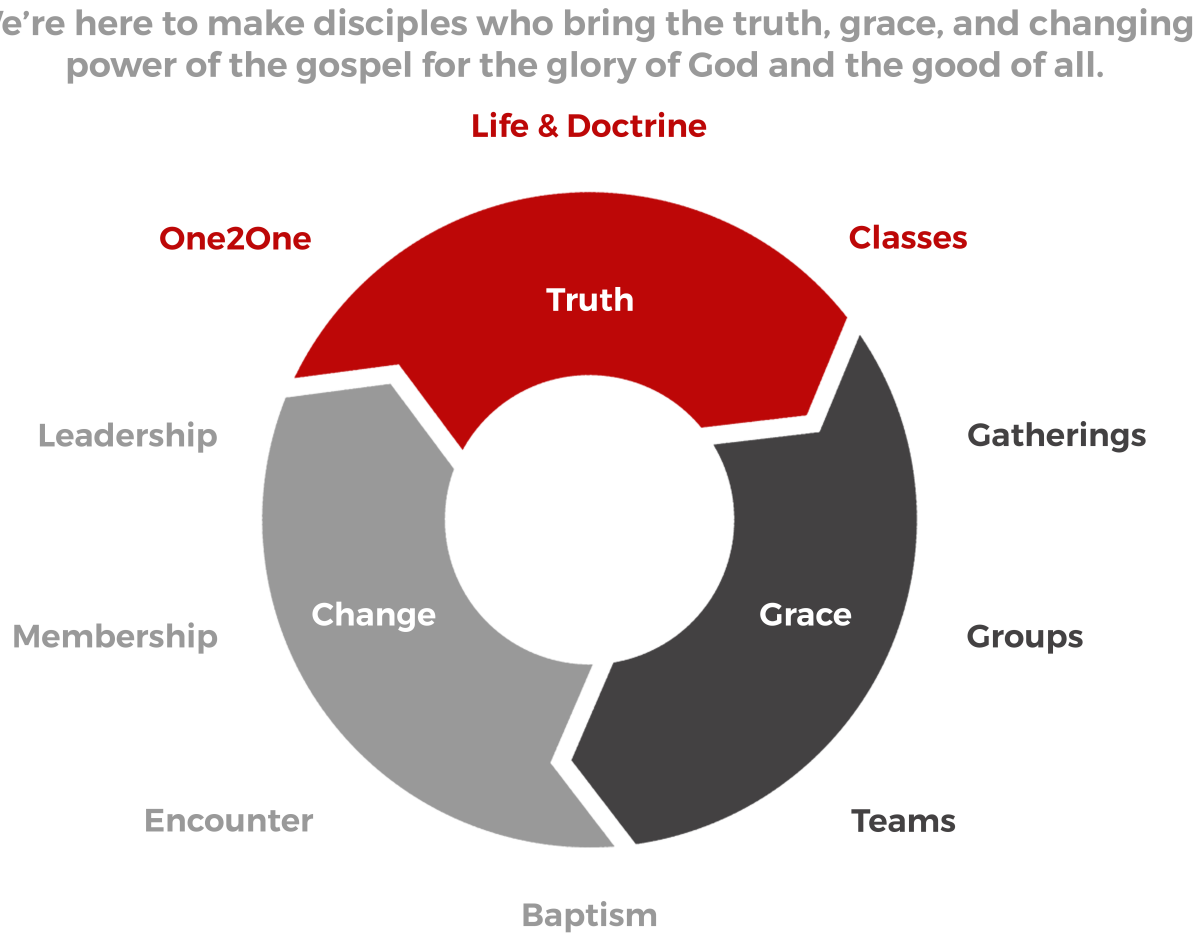
241. Group attendance remained at 25% of ASA at this time.

242. This iteration of the discipleship process did not have a clear training aspect for new group leaders, which was done organically/relationally up to this point. At this stage of growth, that no longer worked, likely contributing to the slow-down of new group leader development.

243. Baptisms continued to shrink as a percentage of ASA.

leadership with a non-charismatic church body.[244] Thus, the "discipleship rhythm" as this iteration of the process was named—an effort to make the process of discipleship more simple—was formed. This process was visually represented in this way:

Figure 7. The Discipleship Rhythm



This graphic represents a significant evolution in the discipleship process at Aletheia Church, and in the thinking of this author. Unlike previous iterations, where each activity (gatherings, groups, classes, teams) was supposed to embrace every facet of a robust biblical

244. This was not because the church body was theologically cessationist, but because the body was so young and unformed in this regard that they simply did not know anything of charismatic experience nor teaching. This led to the development of an "initiating experience" with the Holy Spirit called "Encounter." This developed into a weekend-long experience.

view of discipleship, this version makes peace with the fact that teaching in a class will be more related to communicating truth than, say, a small group, which will be better at a communal experience of grace together.[245] Furthermore, this new design arranges what was a "rhythmic" process into a circular, replicative one.[246] That is, once someone has experience gospel truth and grace, there are certain outcomes expressed as changes that the church can now measure.[247]

Happily, the clarity this process afforded jump-started many of the metrics that had lagged under the previous program.[248] Our church found this new discipleship program more comprehensible.[249] Yet during this same time of growth and expansion, the church began to express a desire for more spiritual and relational depth and connectivity.[250] However, the next stage in evolution was soon coming.

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245. I should say that the straining complexity of the aforementioned process was a muddled attempt to instantiate that same, deep conviction drawn from Murrell, "[The Church doesn't] only make disciples, but they also disciple nations. Jesus told His original disciples to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19). The starting point of discipling nations is discipling individuals, families, clans, and communities. As we engage our communities, establish biblical foundations, equip believers to minister, and empower them to make disciples, it is only a matter of time before whole communities, cities, and nations will be impacted for the honor and glory of God."; Murrell, *WikiChurch,* 203.

246. This change reflects the influence that a few key leaders had on my thinking. I was convicted by words like, "…complex churches are struggling and anemic. Churches without a process or a complicated process for making disciples are floundering. As a whole, cluttered and complex churches are not alive." Rainer and Geiger, *Simple Church,* 22.;

247. Notice the integrative approach here. This was my attempt at this time to integrate identity (described as truth/ orthododoxy) and spirituality (described here as grace/orthopathy) with activity.

248. During its implementation, ASA went from 504 in 2015 to 700 in 2018 (a 40% increase), group attendance went from an average of 120 to 163.5 (a 27% increase), and there were 171 active leaders on average in 2018, up from 149 in 2017 (unfortunately, no more detailed data exists for 2015-16).

249. In a whole church survey to the question, "On a scale of 0-10, how clearly do you think you understand how we make disciples at Aletheia?", the result was 6 in 2017 and 9.2 in 2018.

250. In the same whole-church surveys from 2016-2018, the amount of comments we received like, "It's easy to come on Sunday and never develop relationships," or "I find it difficult to understand how to connect with Jesus and don't know what to do," increased.

Discipleship Process Iteration 4: Wholistic Discipleship

After implementing the above model, fruitfulness did increase somewhat. However, the simplicity of the model did not fully map onto a Christian's experience of reality—in other words, we over-corrected from over-complexity to over-simplicity. For example, the previous process places an encounter with truth prior to one of grace, e.g., attending a class called "One2One"—an introduction to Christianity and the basics of discipleship—*before* a Sunday gathering. But this almost never happened, as most people came to a church gathering before they did anything else. More often than not, someone's first experience would be the gathering. Besides, the value of "grace" was not the only one expressed in the gathering. Indeed, truth was preached, grace experienced, and life change fostered. In short, a desire for simplicity ran roughshod over the experience of reality, and the model failed to serve as either a descriptive grid or a prescriptive process.

This led me, as the Senior Pastor, to go back to the drawing board theologically. After spending some time in prayer and a lot of time in the Scriptures, I reached out to Dr. Steve Murrell—the co-founder of our movement and the author of *Wikichurch: How to make Discipleship Engaging, Empowering, and Viral.* My conversations with him made it obvious that my definition of a disciple was somewhat off. Ironically, it was only by noticing our activities were not producing results that I began to realize my theological vision for discipleship was askew. Thus, my process for making disciples was never going to be quite right. Eventually, Steve helped me ask three important questions: (1) Who is a disciple? (2) What does a disciple do? And (3) how does a pastor lead a church that makes disciples that make disciples?

Through a simple study of the book of Mark and ongoing conversations with my mentor, it became clear (for the biblical/theological reasons previously expounded) that Jesus expected his disciples to understand themselves as his followers, connected in spiritual family, and as fishers of men who were being freed from the world, the flesh, and the evil one. Further, it also became clear that disciples of Jesus engaged in four major activities: they engaged those who were not yet disciples with the gospel, establishing them in their newfound faith, and eventually equipping them with the necessary tools to make disciples and live the Christian life. Then, upon his resurrection and the sending of the Spirit, Christ empowered his disciples to go and make more. Convictions firm in hand, this began a process by which I began to lead my elders and my staff team to the same set of convictions to which I had arrived. But let us here pause our narrative for the purpose of highlighting some prescriptions for this reframing phase of developing a wholistic discipleship ministry.

Principles and Parts

Here are the principles and parts to reframe both an individual and whole-church understanding of discipleship at Aletheia. First, a description of what was actually happening (following Osmer's Descriptive Task), was undertaken. This description began by asking, "How has the church defined discipleship?" Aletheia says it exists to make a disciple, but what has been the definition by which it shall know if it has been successful? Shockingly, this was a question that was, for years, overshadowed by the questions related to activity—the steps or programs a church should implement. During this time sermons and classes gave answers to this question (it is not as though it was wholly ignored), but no explicit, clear, and consistent answer was *always* given. Implicitly, the church celebrated baptisms, growth, and small groups, leaving

the definition of discipleship to be defined by that which was celebrated. Such a lack of explicit clarity around the question of discipleship identity probably explains why three previous iterations of whole-church discipleship were undertaken, and why they never quite worked. It is impossible to develop a system for hitting a target when the target is undefined.

The second part of this phase, somewhat concurrent with the first, was to analyze the quantitative data (attendance, small group attendance, number of leaders, giving) and qualitative data (conversations, church surveys, impressions from the Spirit), to discover to what degree the activity of the church lined up with the identity of a disciple. This step moved into Osmer's Interpretive Task—of understanding what has been occurring. There were two outcomes of this step in the Reframe Phase: First, as the chief leader and theologian of my church, I desired to reframe my own understanding of what a disciple was around the Bible and best theological wisdom on the matter. The second outcome was to understand the degree to which discipleship activity was or was not in harmony with discipleship identity. I learned that in my desire to achieve, I had the cart of activity before the horse of identity, for years lacking the ability to clearly and simply articulate what a disciple of Jesus *was,* yet all the while attempting to clearly and simply articulate how they were made. In reflection, it is unsurprising this did not work.

The third part of the Reframing Phase was relational—I sought out a mentor who could help me process the data I was seeing and the definition I was seeking—and began later but ran concurrent with the previous two steps. I cannot over-state how important this very relational aspect of this process was (and still continues to be). Part of the definition of a disciple that I am underscoring in this thesis is one who is in active, spiritual family with other disciples. As a pastor, I cannot lead what I do not live, therefore finding spiritual fathers and wise

counsellors has been critical to the purposes of this thesis project (and far beyond). In my case, this was done mostly with Dr. Steve Murrell, a co-founder and the current president of the movement of churches to which Aletheia belongs—Every Nation. This helped me develop a deeper, biblical conviction about the definition of a disciple, so that the process of discipleship would make sense. For, without being convinced that such a thing is scriptural, how would any individual or church move forward? Indeed, why would they wish to?

The fourth part of the Reframing Phase involved including the right people at the right time. As a theologically-driven leader—a thinker who prefers to understand facts before implementing changes—the first two parts of this phase mostly involved me, alone. The third part included a mentor. But the fourth part demanded wise involvement of certain elders and staff. Based loosely on Kotter's work, I sought to establish a sense of urgency with the elders that we had not thought or taught clearly enough about discipleship, along with declaring my intentions to fix this problem—a process I followed in a more open-ended way with the staff. While the elders were told explicitly, the staff was asked implicitly questions like, "How does it seem to you we define what a disciple of Jesus actually *is* around here?" These kinds of conversations began preparing the ground for the creation of a leading coalition—a group of people who would embrace this new discipleship definition, and lead others to do the same. This relational approach to reframing proved (and continues to prove) critically important to the instantiation of a wholistic discipleship process. These four parts of the Reframing phase of this thesis-project are graphically represented below:

Figure 8. Reframe

REFRAME Forming a biblical, wise identity of a disciple				
	Person(s)	**Explicit**	**Implicit**	**Conclusion(s)**
Part 1: Description "How has the church defined discipleship?"	Lead Pastor	• No single, clear, explicit definition was given.	• Biblical sermons and classes defined a disciple's identity implicitly and therefore less clearly. • What was celebrated was replicated (growth, baptisms, etc.)	Discipleship was defined implicitly, not explicitly.
Part 2: Interpretation Data Accrual and Analysis	Lead Pastor	• Attendance, giving, leadership, and small group attendance was assiduously recorded. • Annual, church-wide surveys asked congregants for feedback about discipleship.	• Leader reflection, "What does church activity and its associated data suggest about the definition of a disciple?" • As the answer to the identity question is forming, how harmonious is church activity with disciple identity?	• Implicitly defining discipleship partly explains the difficulty articulating discipleship activity. • At Aletheia, activity was ahead of identity, leading to disintegration.
Part 3: Relational Wisdom	Lead Pastor and mentor	• A mentor was sought to reflect upon discipleship.	• This formed part of my (the pastor) ongoing discipleship. • Relationship helped form convictions around discipleship.	• Because discipleship is fundamentally relational, one cannot think well about it without participating in it. • I could not lead what I would not live.
Part 4: Leading a Change of Definition	Lead Pastor, Elders, and Staff	• Intentional conversations about the lack of an explicit definition of a disciple.	• Open-ended questions about the identity of a disciple. • Open-ended questions about changes.	• A clear, explicit definition of a disciple's identity and activity was urgently needed. • Their help was required.

Phase 2: Reimagine - Narrative and Principles

After the work of reframing a disciple's identity was underway, it was time to reimagine the process of discipleship within the life of the individual and the church. This second phase concerned itself mostly with parts (3) and (4) of Osmer's methodology—the normative and pragmatic tasks of figuring out what the Scriptures and wisdom say is the better way and instantiating those needed changes.[251] I shall therefore continue with the narrative regarding Aletheia Church, followed by observing some principles and parts of this phase.

Narrative

The process of reimagination took place at three participation levels within Aletheia: the staff/elder level, the leader level, and the congregational level. At the staff/elder level, this began at our annual staff retreat in early 2018. At that time, I shared with staff and elders the convictions I had developed regarding discipleship. This was accomplished by first sharing the narrative of the last few years, including the data which indicated that the previous approaches to discipleship were well meaning but not entirely effective, and, then teaching the biblical insights explained in chapter 2 of this thesis. By establishing that the current approach to discipleship was not working as we had hoped, I created an open space to lead the staff to the definition of a disciple described above, along with the activities of discipleship that work harmoniously along with it.

Narrating the process of leading others to the definition of a disciple's identity as a follower of Jesus, in spiritual family, a fisher of men, and a freed human in Christ, is somewhat difficult, since it included a plethora of small conversations and public allusions before it came

251. Osmer, *Practical Theology,* KL 1534, 2064

into full view at the staff/elder's retreat in 2018. But, as I was starting to arrive at cognitive rest about a disciple's identity, I took the leaders along with me, as it was now time to reimagine how that definition of what a disciple was had direct implication for what a church that claims to make them should do. This process took time, as any major leadership change must, lest the leader seem like he is unreliably blown to and fro by passing opinions masquerading as convictions. For the staff and elders of Aletheia church, this meant a combination of (1) data presentations (2) one-on-one conversations, (3) and extensive group discussion.

Data presentation is, perhaps, the easiest and strongest way to make one's case, and in the case of Aletheia it was a simple matter of showing and explaining the data of our shared experience. Having walked our team through the information described in phase one above, explaining how the previous ways of construing discipleship were not working as hoped, I then asked them to describe in writing what they imagined a fruitful, successful disciple of Jesus to be. I took their written responses and assessed their answers. Those parts which were common with the definition I was interested in promulgating, I shared in the next session, noting how many of them were intuiting basically the same ideas as the Bible was suggesting. I then took this opportunity to describe how our church activities must align with a disciple's identity: a follower of Jesus, in spiritual family with other disciples, fishing for men and women, and free in Christ to be and become all Christ redeemed them to be. This definition was universally accepted, agreed upon, and embraced. A coalition with a shared vision was forming.[252]

252. I am here employing many of the principles laid out in John Kotter's *Leading Change.* Of his eight steps, the first four (Urgency, Coalition, Vision, and Sharing Vision) are included in the process of developing shared convictions. See John Kotter, *Leading Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012).

In the next session, a similar process was followed to explain the activities of faithful discipleship. In preparation for this, I had my staff and elders read Murrell's *Wikichurch*, which laid a solid groundwork for the ensuing conversation. In that session, I taught the leadership team and elders the four E's outlined in this thesis-project, issuing from Murrell's work. Then, I handed out a Church Activity Inventory sheet to each person. This sheet contained a list of almost every activity that our church did—large and small. In columns to the right there were three choices, "Essential to the Mission," "Good, but not Essential," and "Hindering us from Accomplishing the Mission." I collected their answers, collated them, and in the following session presented their results anonymously in graphs. Some activities were, as a result of this assessment, cut from programming. Others were kept. Quite a few were modified.

Among the three most heavily modified programs were the four major activities of our church, and probably most other churches: Sunday gatherings, small groups, classes, and ministry teams. It was determined that Sunday gatherings and small groups could do all four E's of the discipleship activity category. Previously, Sunday gatherings were mostly about sound teaching and engaging worship. Under this more wholistic vision of discipleship, Sundays would engage culture and community with the gospel, and through teaching and worship disciples would be established in the faith, the Scriptures, and spiritual family. Because this was the gathering of the Saints, extra time would be given before and after gatherings to foster relationships, conversation, and deepen the bonds of spiritual family. Because Sunday has many moving parts, we would shift to a determined way to equip others for leadership via that meeting, be it by training and empowering someone to give an offering exhortation, lead a particular song, or even preach the sermon. Finally, Sundays would end with a planned and purposeful

benediction, prayerfully empowering those gathered to go and make disciples, even as they embraced their identity as disciples themselves. Additionally, Sunday would be focused on helping others take their next discipleship step, with the sermon and the gathering ending with a clear, compelling invitation to grow as a disciple of Jesus by stepping into one of our upcoming classes, which were now re-organized around these four E's.

The old class regime was reimagined into four clear steps. The first course which would satisfy the "engage" step would be called "Discover Discipleship." Four weeks long, it would focus on a disciple's identity, activity, and spirituality, with the final class being an opportunity to pray for anyone who desired it, invite any who would like to become disciples by repenting and believing the gospel, and then outlining to them what the next steps on their discipleship journey should be: the establish class.

The class that would help disciples become established in the faith, the disciplines, and in the spiritual family of Aletheia would be called "Life and Doctrine." This class, nine weeks long, would be a deeper exploration into the identity, activity, and spirituality of the Christian life, and serve to establish more robust foundations than the first course.[253] The third class would be called "Making Disciples," and this class would focus on equipping believers with the skills and tools necessary to share the gospel, to explain their testimony, and lead a small group. The final class would be called "Empowering Leaders," and this class would focus on just that—what it means to be an empowered leader, and how they, as leaders, could more effectively go be and make disciples.

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253. I should note that this class is currently under revision as a result of some of the findings of this thesis-project. We discovered that this class—unchanged for years—no longer serves the clarified "job description" of the class at this step, namely to establish strong biblical foundations, spiritual disciplines, and a sense of spiritual family.

Small groups were the third area of church activity to come under heavy revision. While it was determined that classes should be assigned to each "E," it was also decided that groups, like Sunday gatherings, could embody all four E's. This required us to re-tool many of our groups. In a church of over a thousand at that time, some groups were affinity-based, others study-based, and others more social. By gathering all the group leaders together and taking them through a similar processes described above that the staff and elders underwent, they also embraced the vision for a more wholistic experience of discipleship within the church, and most were ready to revise their groups as necessary.[254] The changes were that all groups would now welcome those who didn't yet know Christ (engage), focus on Scripture as the center of their gathering (establish), and actively seek to equip and empower new leaders as the opportunity arose, because the point of groups was no longer merely to gather with those whom one liked, but to make disciples.

The final area of the church to come under major revision were ministry teams. These were mostly teams of servants who helped execute our Sunday gatherings: setup and teardown, sound and media, worship and music, kids and youth, etc. For many years, the common experience of these teams was that, after a while, members would tire of simply "doing" a lot of activity, especially without seeing how that activity connected with the mission of the church to "make disciples who bring the truth, grace, and changing power of the gospel." Through the process of reimagining, however, team membership became about engaging and establishing disciples—giving them a place to belong, come to believe, and be more fully established. Team

254. We used this as an opportunity to test the third "E" class, "Making Disciples," on the current group leaders. This class is designed to give vision and skills for small-group-based discipleship, and helped us to unify our current group leaders around the newer, more wholistic way of making disciples.

leadership became a matter of equipping and empowering—discovering who can lead the team, giving them skills and opportunity to lead well, and then empowering them to be leaders. It should also be noted that a growing dissatisfaction with all the church activity was directly linked to anemic spirituality—a problem we shall come to shortly.

Having given a narrative of the changes involved in my own experience with the Reimagine phase of wholistic discipleship, we shall again pause to observe the principles and parts of this reimagining phase of the thesis-project.

Principles and Parts

The second phase of this thesis-project involved reimagining the process of discipleship at Aletheia church, in connection with the development of conviction around the identity of a disciple. This phase involved at least four parts, all deeply rooted in the position that the church must reimagine its activities to be in alignment with a disciple's identity. Metaphorically, one cannot hit a target without having a target, and now that the target (a disciple's identity) was clarified, the church's activity needed renovation.

The first part of the Reimagine phase of this thesis project was to clearly define a disciple's identity. Through a process of change leadership, prayer, and biblical exposition, the staff and elders of Aletheia arrived at a shared conviction about who a disciple is. First and foremost, a disciple of Jesus is one who is following him, by faith in the gospel, into a relationship with the Trinity. Second, a disciple is transplanted into a new family, the Church, the earthly and visible form of his adoption into God's family. Third, his identity is wrapped up in his vocation (vocare - Latin, v. "to call") as one who is made for the mission of God, which is irreducibly connected to Christ's command to make disciples. Finally, a disciple is a human fully

freed from sin and fully alive with the life of the Trinity, enabling him to be and become all he was meant to be in this life, and in the world to come. Reimagining the church's activity required agreement that this was to be a disciple's identity, lest the goal of wholistic integration be missed entirely.

The second part of this phase was the creation of a sense of urgency around the misalignment of the church's current activity with a disciple's identity. This phase relied on the explicit presentation of data (most of which is located in the previous section) and the implicit reliance on the Spirit to convict and lead individual department heads. Additionally, I asked each staff person to read *WikiChurch* by Steve Murrell. The result was that the team arrived at the conclusion that something was not quite working. Determining what, exactly, was the goal of the next part of this phase.

The third part of this phase required us to judge our activities. By making a detailed list of everything the church did from large to small, each team member was asked to decide if that particular activity was helping, hindering, or unrelated to the activities of making disciples. Through prayerful reliance on the Spirit to guide us and trusting the talents of each staff person, we arrived at two important convictions. First, we came to agree that Murrell's insights on a disciple's activity are right—the 4E's described earlier. Second, we could now see clearly which activities were not helping the church do the work of making disciples.

The fourth part of this phase was to actually change the church's activity. Whatever activities were helping integrate a discipleship identity and activity were kept. Whatever activities hindered this integration were stopped. For other church activities, it was not immediately clear whether they fit under this reimagined discipleship regime. Therefore, they

required more careful, prayerful, and open consideration. This required me to non-anxiously listen and wait for those conclusions to form.[255] Then, over a period of time, changes were made to the normal routines of the church. Are Sunday gatherings engaging to the culture and community? Is the preaching helping to establish disciples? How is the liturgy equipping and empowering new leaders and disciples? Everything from groups, gatherings, classes, and teams were reimagined around the wholistic integration of identity and activity. Plans for necessary changes were made. And, since changes cannot be made all at once, a plan for reimagination over the following 18 months was adopted.[256]

This Reimagine phase, with its four parts, various tasks, and much larger personnel involvement has meant that it has taken the longest time to instantiate. It began at Aletheia in January of 2019 and continued apace until the pandemic of 2020 interrupted the scheduled roll-out of certain changes. But at the time of this writing, the work of the plan developed in 2019 has been largely rescheduled and should be complete by the end of 2020. How these changes have enabled and interacted with the third phase of this thesis-project is the matter to which we shall presently turn. But so far, the work of the Reimagine Phase can be represented by the chart below.

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255. I am here intentionally referring to Bowen Family Systems theory related to church leadership. See Peter L. Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What* (Herndon, VA: Albon Institute, 2006).; Edwin Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York, NY: Church Publishing, 2007).

256. For instance, when I developed the convictions for the fourth stage of our discipleship evolution (Wholistic Discipleship), I took six months to unofficially test them on my staff, then another six months to get my staff and elders on board. Once that was done, we gave ourselves 18 months to roll out each of the four E's as whole-church activities. For more on strategically planning change, see Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A 21st Century Approach for Church and Ministry Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013).

Figure 9: Reimagine

REIMAGINE In light of identity, program church activity				
	Person(s)	**Explicit**	**Implicit**	**Conclusion(s)**
Part 1: Define Identity	Lead Pastor, staff, and elders	The definition of a disciple was taught.	Conviction was developed around what the Bible says a disciple is.	A disciple is a follower of Jesus, in spiritual family, a fisher of men, and a freed human in Christ.
Part 2: Create Urgency	Lead Pastor and staff	Data presentation to suggest that something is not working.	• Staff read WikiChurch by Steve Murrell • Ask staff to pray and reflect on how well their department is doing.	Something we were doing wasn't quite working.
Part 3: Judge Activity	Lead Pastor and staff	• Ask the question, "Are our church activities in line with/helping produce a disciple's identity?" • Whole-Church Activity Inventory	Reliance on the Holy Spirit and the talents of each staff person to produce insight.	• A disciple engages the lost, is established in the faith, is equipped to make disciples, and empowered to do so. • Church activity was not wholly aligned with a disciple's identity.
Part 4: Change	Lead Pastor, Elders, and Staff	• Department heads propose new approaches to their associated activities around the 4E's. • Decisions: Kill, keep, or change. • Timing: When would these changes take place?	• Open-ended questions about what could or should be added.	• All church activity was reimagined through the 4E's. • A plan for implementation was developed. • Over an 18-month period, these changes were implemented.

Phase 3: Renew - Narrative and Principles

The final phase of this wholistic discipleship thesis-project has been somewhat contiguous with the second. For, even as small changes toward a more wholistic vision of discipleship were made, the spiritual experience of individuals and groups within the church also began to change. The process of becoming a church that has been (and is being) reframed and reimagined as one that makes *whole* disciples—those whose identity, activity, and spirituality have been and are being re-integrated before God and the world, by faith in the gospel—has required me to pay much closer attention to the emotional, spiritual, and lived experiences of those for whom our church is home. This work of the thesis-project has stirred all three in both good and challenging ways at Aletheia, whose narrative we take up one final time.

Narrative

As mentioned, most of the changes described in the previous section began to take place at the beginning of 2019. Our leadership team anticipated that it would take not less than 18 months to make the changes well, and then another 18 months for the culture of our church to reorient itself toward a wholistic discipleship culture.[257] And sure enough, as soon as changed began to be implemented, there were some challenges with which to contend.

For years we have issued an annual survey of our church to understand its culture better, especially surrounding the topic of discipleship. It usually revealed that a frustratingly

257. Mayhew notes that culture change can take up to seven years, but three years is a fast pace. See Ralph Mayhew, *How to Create the Organizational Culture You Want: Leading Cultural Change in Business, Church, and the Social Sector.* (Australia: Ralph Mayhew 1830, 2016).

large portion of our church were not making disciples, though it does trend positive.[258] Yet, there seemed to be a drop-off in the amount of people who felt both equipped and empowered to tell others about Christ.[259] We also discovered an important artifact in our qualitative research[260] *and* in our personal conversations: there was a holy discontent with the way we were engaging the culture and community around us with the gospel.[261] *And,* there was a discontent that those to whom the gospel was preached also felt, though different. Where the first kind of discontent was experienced by Christians desiring change in their community or the lives of those they loved, the second was a discontent from the conviction of the Holy Spirit that leads to repentance (2 Cor. 7:10). On a new member's Sunday not long after these changes began to be made, there were about 18 people on stage introducing themselves to the church and explaining how they came to faith. Their stories had one thing in common: conviction. Some version of, "I came to Aletheia and heard the preaching, and I was unsettled—I wasn't living right. I needed to get right with God," kept being repeated. This is one example of the spirituality of discontent, under the preaching of the gospel designed to engage those who don't know Jesus.

Our survey and personal conversations also revealed that there was, on the part of some, a growing anxiety that serving on a Sunday ministry team was not connected to the

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258. This is the same whole-church survey referenced before. And, while more recent surveys have shown an increase in the number of respondents who felt they understood how our church made disciples, it also revealed that very few of them were actually doing the 4E's.

259. In the most recent survey, in answer to the question, "How well does Aletheia equip and empower others to make disciples," the number of people who answered "poorly," or "very poorly" was five times the response to the same question about engaging and establishing.

260. I here refer to whole-church surveys and staff-level surveys.

261. This is not referring to the attractional success of our gatherings. Rather, this is referring to the way our large church was *not* engaging the culture of our immediate area. There were an increasing number of people who, in their freely written responses to theses surveys expressed a dissatisfaction with the way their in-church service on a team did not seem to impact their out-of-church community.

mission, just to raw church growth. This too was insightful. While burnout can be a common experience among church members who serve on a team, this seemed different. Our qualitative research along with individual, anecdotal conversations[262] led us to conclude that there was innate discontentment, not with God, his mission, or even the church, but with the feeling of misalignment between who they were (identity) and what they were doing (activity).

Trying to understand the tension, we turned to prayer. In the beginning of 2020, we called our entire church to a week of prayer, fasting, and consecration. This had many good effects (there aren't too many ways praying and fasting can go wrong), but the greatest effect it had on our discipleship process and culture was to give us a renewed sense of mission, purpose, and desire for God's presence both within our church and within its community. And sure enough, the following months showed spectacular results on all fronts. Our year-on-year growth rate was the highest it had been in over five years, our small group participation (both in real numbers and as a percentage of Sunday attendance) was up, giving was spectacular, group leaders were being released, teams were happy, and the lost were getting saved more than ever before.[263]

It has been my observation that this "spirituality" domain—the creational, animational, and eschatological work of the Holy Spirit within a disciple—is the critical component that, while it cannot be forced or programmed, can be fostered and prepared for. For example, a church may have a wonderful plan to engage the community, and robust theology about being a follower of Jesus (the first step in our wholistic process), but unless and until the

262. I here refer to whole-church surveys and staff-level surveys.

263. Annualized attendance growth was up 26%, the first financial quarter was positive 26.6% over budget, and we held an additional baptism event.

Spirit does His creational work to regenerate the hearts of the lost and to soften with compassion the hearts of the Church, no one will *actually* be born again. If a disciple's internal spiritual life is not marked by a real experience of his blood bought, Spirit-wrought sonship, then a theological identity of "family," or activity of "establishing" will be of little use.[264] The Holy Spirit must animate the disciple's obedience with new gifts (1 Cor. 12, 14), new fruit (Gal. 5), and a new power to bear witness to the gospel (Acts 1), or the best strategy to equip disciples as fishers with Jesus won't have any real effect. And finally, unless the Holy Spirit is giving the freedom and transformation of 2 Cor. 3:17-18, then no act of empowerment or designation as "freed in Christ" will matter much.

Now, I fully admit that this domain of spirituality is less clear, less actionable, and therefore less easy to discuss. Yet, in the most recent part of our journey toward Wholistic Discipleship it has been precisely this domain which has proven the most vital *and* the most brittle. This was made painfully clear when COVID-19 arrived, bringing with it all manner of disruption.

At some future point, it will be fruitful to carefully examine all the ways the COVID-19 pandemic changed the way church is done in the West. But for the purposes of this thesis-project, I can only begin to reflect on some of the ways it highlighted strengths and gaps within *our* discipleship process. Three of those gaps were individual spirituality, relational connectivity, and ethnic diversity. As will soon become clear, the months-long (and at the time of

264. Barth acknowledges as much: "In the work of the Holy Spirit it comes about that the man who with the same organs could once say No thereto, again with the same organs, in so far as they can be used for this purpose, may and can and must say Yes."; Karl Barth, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Thomas F. Torrance, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of God, Part 4,* vol. 4 (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 27.

this writing, still ongoing) nature of this crisis stressed and revealed much about the Spirit's work along these three lines.

One of the first and easiest gaps to detect in our church's discipleship process was in the realm of individual spirituality. Put simply, most of our people—pastors, elders, staff, leaders, and laity—discovered that their own spiritual bandwidth was not sufficient to carry them through the trial of long-term lockdowns, no physical church gatherings, economic hardship, emotional crises, physical sickness, and political instability, all of which were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the language of the heuristic, many of us were not well-established (activity) enough in spiritual disciplines (spirituality) to support the kind of spirituality that the moment demanded. In other words, it uncovered an activity-spirituality gap.

The second gap the pandemic revealed was along the lines of relational security within our spiritual family. In our church, COVID-19 ruptured relationships along pre-existent fissures. During this time with enforced lockdowns, little physical interaction, and church gatherings entirely virtual, relationships that were already weak or stressed withered and broke down.[265] Conversely, relationships that had momentum grew, despite the challenges.[266] What explained this phenomena? It did not seem to be orthodoxy-related (our theology did not suddenly change), nor orthopraxy-related (our activities remained the same, though altered by COVID in their delivery), nor orthopathy-related (we actually were praying and fasting *more* immediately after this time). While the relational impact of the COVID-19 season cannot be fully attributed to some flaw in our church's discipleship process, neither can the flaws it seems to

265. In our church, folks who were already on the margins of community (either because they were only barely "in" to begin with, or they were already dissatisfied and considering departure) left pretty quickly.

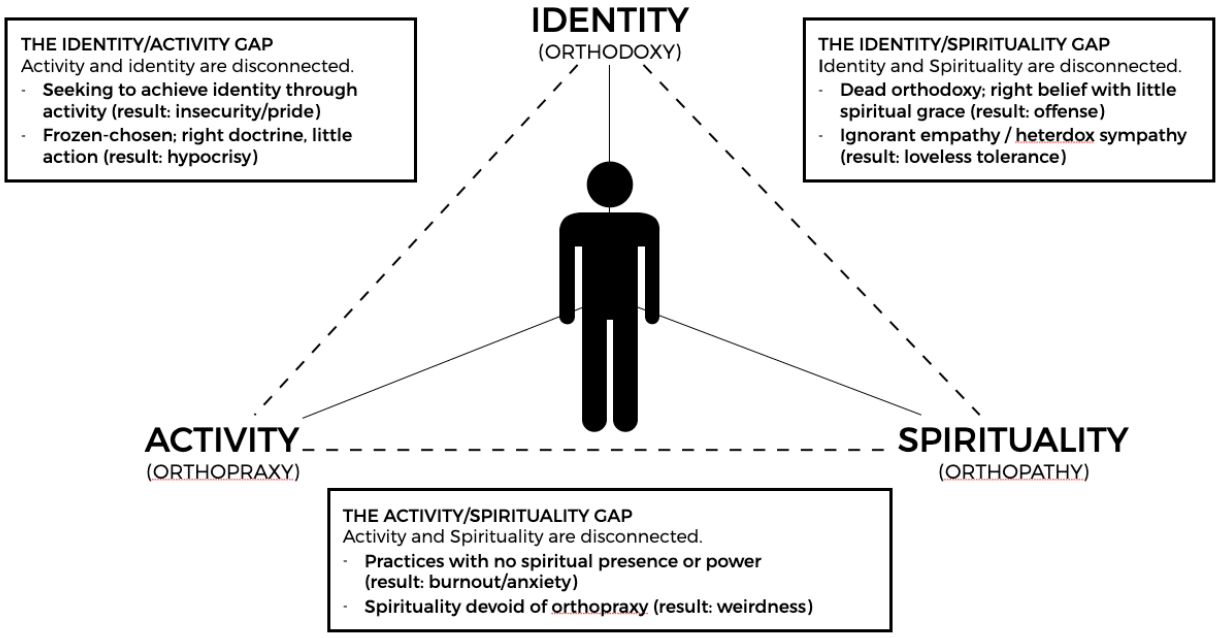
266. For us, this looked like a lot of people who were interested in checking church out, were recently connecting, or had just become Christians taking steps through the discipleship process and building relationships.

have exacerbated simply be excused as mere anomalies. One such flaw seems to be explainable as a gap between activity and identity. In a large, busy church such as ours, there is plenty for anyone to do—chairs to be arranged, programs to run, meetings to attend. But when that activity stopped, those who had been *doing* a lot but who had not been rooted in a biblical self-concept were shaken—and some blamed the church. On the other hand, those who had great theology but had usually sat in the back rows and let others do most of the work were now being encouraged to personally and creatively love their neighbors, personally attend church and groups online, and take a much greater level of responsibility for their own activities—and some never did. I characterize this as an identity-activity gap. Those who seek to achieve their identity (a phenomena that is common for a church nestled between Harvard and MIT) will not feel secure when they are made to be still—just the way COVID caused most church activity to cease. On the other hand, those mentally orthodox who rarely live out the implication of their creed may feel just as insecure when their service and self-leadership is required and found wanting.

The third gap that was made plain to us came as the result of a sermon I preached. After the tragedies of racialized police violence that characterized the Summer of 2020, a sermon I gave on justice highlighted an identity-spirituality gap. I preached a true sermon, but for many it was received as devoid of empathy, culturally tone-deaf, and in some ways offensive to some of the non-white members of our diverse spiritual family. This grace gap took two general forms: graceless orthodoxy or ignorant empathy. Graceless orthodoxy was the felt experience of some of our people in that particular moment, resulting in emotional pain which broke down discipleship relationships. The reaction of some, however, was to advocate for a "grace with no

knowledge," — the triumph of empathy that clouds orthodoxy.[267] All this resulted in a lot of personal soul-searching, some people leaving, and (on the plus side) a renewed commitment to embody a Spirit-saturated, biblical diversity.[268] To illustrate these gaps, see *figure d.*

Figure 10: Triangular Representation


IDENTITY
(ORTHODOXY)
THE IDENTITY/ACTIVITY GAP
Activity and identity are disconnected.
- Seeking to achieve identity through activity (result: insecurity/pride)
- Frozen-chosen; right doctrine, little action (result: hypocrisy)
THE IDENTITY/SPIRITUALITY GAP
Identity and Spirituality are disconnected.
- Dead orthodoxy; right belief with little spiritual grace (result: offense)
- Ignorant empathy / heterdox sympathy (result: loveless tolerance)
ACTIVITY
(ORTHOPRAXY)
SPIRITUALITY
(ORTHOPATHY)
THE ACTIVITY/SPIRITUALITY GAP
Activity and Spirituality are disconnected.
- Practices with no spiritual presence or power (result: burnout/anxiety)
- Spirituality devoid of orthopraxy (result: weirdness)

I admit that the chart above is the least-formed, as it is the most recently added attempt to understand a late-breaking and ongoing development in this thesis-project. But I believe it has more explanatory power than it lacks because it describes the kind of disintegration that I observed within the process of this thesis-project and that I have observed within my entire ministry career.

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267. For instance, in response to this sermon, some began to embrace, rather suddenly, ideas that need little reflection to conclude are unsuitable within a Christian worldview (Critical Race Theory on the one hand and ethnic nationalism on the other).

268. This is not a thesis-project about multi-ethnic church leadership, but this gap has led us to press more deeply into discovering what wholistic discipleship looks like for such a diverse church as ours. This has led to small group curriculum changes, a review of all our taught materials with a view to teaching what the Bible says about biblical diversity, and a more prayerful, humble, and needy posture before the Lord as we ask the Spirit to create among us what only he can—unity amidst diversity.

The first gap is a common disintegration between identity (orthodoxy) and activity (orthopraxy) running in either direction. Activity to achieve or earn a disciple's identity is a kind of works righteousness resulting in pride if one feels one has achieved it, and insecurity if not. On the other hand, identity devoid of right activity is a kind of elder-brotherism—knowing the right things and having the right position, but not doing what one ought, resulting in hypocrisy. But, when a disciple's activity and identity are integrated, one embodies a secure, living truth.

The identity-spirituality gap illustrates another disintegration most pastors could probably recognize. When identity/orthodoxy is devoid of spiritual presence and power, the result is a dead orthodoxy that offends with the sharp edges of truth. On the other hand, when spirituality and graciousness are not rooted in the solid rock of orthodoxy, what results is a weaponized form of empathy that demands tolerance devoid of true love. However, if spirituality and identity are integrated in the life of a disciple, she experiences God's present, active grace, and has grace to share with others.

Finally, the activity-spirituality gap is likewise familiar to any who have been in ministry for very long. Doing what a disciple should be doing without the Spirit's power will result in a lot of anxiety, because the doing will lack anointing. Left unchecked, this could result in burnout. On the other hand (a hand that is very common in MPCM circles in my experience), spirituality that is not expressed with right activity will become very strange, indeed—a strangeness that Paul himself had to correct in large portions of 1 Corinthians. But when a disciple's activity is breathed upon by the Spirit's presence, then there is a grace and anointing to it which enables fruitfulness, joy, and actual life change.

Admittedly, this portion of the thesis-project is ongoing, and shall be more fully reflected upon in the following chapter. But now the narrative will pause to give way to a final, few, principled observations.

Principles and Parts

The spirituality domain, with its attendant potential gaps in communication with the other domains, is the most difficult to program and therefore to prescribe. However, this phase of the wholistic discipleship thesis-project has yielded a few principles and parts that are important to note. The first principle of this phase has been an increased observation. Obviously, making large-scale changes to a church demands one eventually ask how those changes are going. But because this phase concerns itself with the spirituality of the church as a whole and individual disciples, the observation has been both quantitative, qualitative, and spiritual. Since wholistic integration has been the goal, ongoing observation along those three lines as been required in this phase.

A second principle in this phase is to mind the gaps—to attend to the truth, grace, and change gaps mentioned above. This triangular way of understanding wholistic discipleship has given a simple heuristic for understanding how systems within the church and individuals are doing as disciples. This second part is a way to observe (first part) the animational work of the Spirit—to convict or empower integration as the church has embraced the goals of this thesis-project.

A third part to the Renewal phase is explicit and implicit experience of repentance and reconciliation. As these gaps have been highlighted in individuals or across relationships

(pastor and church, elders and staff), responding to the conviction of the Spirit with repentance and reconciliation has been required. I can only imagine it will continue to be.

The fourth principle of this Renewal phase has been the most difficult of them all—perseverance. Yet, the work of the Renewal Phase requires diligent commitment to foster, prepare for, and respond to the work of the Spirit in an ongoing way. It is this part of the Renewal Phase that is both ongoing and eschatological. Just as the work of the Spirit in the church connects us to the age to come, the work of the Spirit will also continue to happen until that day. Until then, the persevering work of this thesis-project will continue. The Renewal Phase has been represented in the chart below.

Figure 12: Renew

RENEW Foster, Prepare for, and Respond to the Work of the Spirit				
	Person(s)	**Explicit**	**Implicit**	**Conclusion(s)**
Part 1: Observe	Lead Pastor, staff, elders, and lay leaders	• Spiritual surveys of church activities. • Listening prayer, asking God to speak to us about the church. • Where is there a sense of God's presence or lack thereof?	Training our staff and leaders to attend not only to what disciples are doing, but how they are experiencing their identity, activity and spirituality.	Certain areas of discontent have appeared where God seems to be highlighting gaps or needed improvements.

RENEW Foster, Prepare for, and Respond to the Work of the Spirit				
	Person(s)	**Explicit**	**Implicit**	**Conclusion(s)**
Part 2: Mind the Gaps	Lead Pastor and staff	• The unexpected ways COVID impacted the work of wholistic discipleship led to the development of the gaps heuristic. • Staff and leaders need to be trained on these gaps.	The gaps give language and definition to common phenomena that continue to arise in the work of wholistic discipleship.	• The identity/ activity gap describes disintegration between identity and activity. • The identity/ spirituality gap describes disintegration between identity and spirituality. • The activity/ spirituality gap describes disintegration between activity and spirituality.
Part 3: Repentance and Reconciliation	Whole Church	In response to the gaps, where is repentance needed? Where is there an opportunity for reconciliation?	Reliance on the Holy Spirit and the talents of each staff person to produce insight.	• The racial tension of 2020 highlighted grace gaps.
Part 4: Persevering	Whole Church	• What spiritual steps need to be taken to foster and prepare for God to work powerfully? • Create church rhythms to highlight this Spiritual part of wholistic discipleship.	Open-ended questions about what could or should be added.	• The persevering work of this phase connects to the eschatological work of the Spirit.

Conclusions

The experimental aspect of this thesis-project has been going on for years within my own church. This chapter has described this experiment narratively and principally. Testing the definition and process of discipleship here outlined and researched—that a disciple is one whose

identity, activity, and spirituality have been and are being re-integrated before God and the world, by faith in the gospel and that discipleship is the process of this reintegration—has demonstrated to me that it works, and yet that it yet requires more work. The next chapter will explore the results of this multi-year experiment and offer some principled reflections about my learning.

CHAPTER 5

WHOLISTIC DISCIPLESHIP: SOME REFLECTIONS

In this thesis-project I have attempted something admittedly rather unusual; to articulate, instantiate, and then reflect upon a wholistic vision for discipleship at Aletheia Church. As the previous chapter indicates, this work has been fraught with challenges. In many ways the work of this thesis-project is ongoing, and therefore this project merely represents the work so far. Yet, this process has enabled me to become a more reflective practitioner of ministry leadership, even rekindling the flames of my passion for that ministry into which Christ called all those who are his—to go make disciples. So, as unusual as my approach here has been, I have never been more convinced that now is the time to articulate such a wholistic vision for discipleship, for the sake my own church and, perhaps, others as well.

I have argued that a disciple is a human, fully alive and integrated in his identity, activity, and spirituality, living in communion with the Trinity and oriented toward the world, rightly. Discipleship is the process by which all of this becomes possible. By engaging with the relevant literature and reflecting upon the biblical-theological themes associated with discipleship, I have supported this definition, recognizing that other perspectives on Great Commission obedience have contributed much to the formation of the one here defended. This thesis-project chronicled the process by which I have taken (and continue to take) my own church—Aletheia Church—through the process of reframing our definition of a disciple's identity, reimagining the processes and programs of discipleship activity, and renewing the elusive but indispensable work of the Spirit who makes all this possible. Having now some time

to reflect on this process, I shall reflect upon some of the benefits, liabilities, and matters for ongoing exploration around the vision of wholistic discipleship.

Benefits of Wholistic Discipleship

It should be no surprise that I find far greater benefits to wholistic discipleship than liabilities. I believe that organizing a church generally (and my church, specifically) around wholistic discipleship (1) gives missional alignment and focus, (2) creates a built-in hedgehog principle, (3) empowers racial reconciliation and social responsibility, (4) fosters an environment of mental/emotional health, and (5) creates a heuristic for individual spiritual health. I shall expound upon each of these benefits, briefly.

(1) Missional Alignment and Focus - If the mission of the church can be understood and shaped around making whole disciples of Jesus as explained in this thesis-project, then much of what Rainer desired in *Simple Church* is made possible. At Aletheia, the mission of discipleship has always taken top priority, which must be at least part of the explanation for our fruitfulness. As the mission of "making disciples who bring the truth (identity), grace (spirituality), and changing power (activity) of the gospel for the glory of God and the good of all people (di-polarity)" is the target toward which we constantly reorient ourselves, we not only find ourselves actually doing that work, but reflecting upon how well we are doing it. Such a positive orientation toward the right things leads to the second benefit—the avoidance of the wrong ones.

(2) A Built-In Hedgehog Principle. In his book *Good to Great,* Jim Collins explains what he calls "The Hedgehog Concept."[269] This is the ability to radically focus on the mission and radically exclude every other good idea that is not the right one. For Aletheia, the ability to focus on the mission of wholistic discipleship organizes the thousands of other good things that our church *could* do in relationship to the one thing it *should* do, giving the leaders the often difficult ability to say, "no." Churches can be difficult places to exclude ideas, initiatives, well-meaning endeavors, and community actions because Christians are supposed to be nice people, and often it does not feel nice to say no. However, the more the leaders of Aletheia Church have focused on the mission of making whole disciples, the less staff and pastors have had to say no, and the more the disciples themselves have re-ordered their lives and priorities around what a disciple ought to do, and away from what one ought not to do. Because the mission of making disciples is so important to Jesus and to us, we are benefited by the ability to guard our focus on that mission and exclude other good ideas that simply do not happen to be the right ones for us.

(3) Empowering Racial Reconciliation and Social Responsibility. At the beginning of this thesis-project, I claimed that the concept of discipleship can bear the burden of biblical social ethics, if that concept of discipleship is wholistic. In the case of Aletheia Church, it is precisely *because* of our approach to wholistic discipleship that we have always been intentionally multi-ethnic and why we continue to pursue this part of our identity. This and other social responsibilities (like care for the poor, global missions, financial stewardship, etc.) are functions of discipleship activity, identity, and spirituality. For example, because a disciple engages culture and community with the gospel, a disciple must engage at precisely those points

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269. Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't.* (New York, NY: Harper Business, 2011) 140.

of culture that are most devoid of it. In the case of racism, for example, this has caused us to ask, "how can we most effectively engage the topic of race?" Because disciples are established in spiritual family (identity), we also ask, "How do we theologically instruct and culturally impart spiritual unity amidst our diversity?" And finally, if it is true that a disciple is someone who is free in Christ (identity) and that freedom is part of the animational and eschatological work of the Spirit, how does the Spirit work to loosen the bonds of oppression in the here and now as a sign and foretaste of the world to come? We have come to find that these questions arise naturally out of our desire to produce disciples wholistically.

(4) Fostering an Environment of Emotional and Mental Health. Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) posits that behavior, thinking, and emotionality are connected, leading to the therapeutic conclusion that changing one of these helps change the others.[270] For a church that approaches discipleship as the process of integrating identity, activity, and spirituality before God and the world, we have created a space for that process of reintegration which may not exist if discipleship were defined differently. While wholistic discipleship is not intended to map onto the current findings of the psychological community, it seems that the culture created by defining discipleship in this way has a high likelihood of avoiding the well-intentioned yet simplistic explanations of mental/emotional health challenges that some disciples face.[271] In fact, because discipleship is approached wholistically, we find that giving pastoral counsel regarding behavior, belief, or spirituality all have positive effects, while also creating space for the professional

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270. Hayes SC, Villatte M, Levin M, Hildebrandt M, "Open, aware, and active: contextual approaches as an emerging trend in the behavioral and cognitive therapies" *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*. 7 (1), 2011: 141–68.

271. "Many well-meaning endeavours in 'Christian ministry' in this area succumb to combinations of naivety, ignorance, and a lack of experience in handling the complexity of people's lives."; Andrew McKie, "Review of The Pastoral Care of People with Mental Health Problems by Marion L. S. Carson," *Themelios* 34, no. 2 (2009): 278.

qualifications of psychologists, psychiatrists, and other mental health professionals. Yet, because our approach contains a spiritual domain, we retain the awareness of the unseen realm, and the effects that demonic activity can have on persons, leaving room for a spiritual solution to these problems. Thus, we find that discipleship as here defined facilitates deep, mental/emotional transformation,[272] whilst leaving space for the intervention of specialists when needed.

(5) Creating a Heuristic for Spiritual Vitality. If the program of wholistic discipleship works to create healthy, whole disciples of Jesus, then it *should* be able to reverse engineer areas of un-health or dysfunction. For instance, if we find that a particular small group is not growing, we may ask if the group is adequately doing work of engaging others (activity), if they are ignorant of their Christian identity as fishers of men and women (identity), or if the Spirit simply has not yet breathed upon their efforts (spirituality). Or, if a team leader is having a hard time handing off certain responsibilities to a younger disciple who is ready for more, we may ask if he is doing the work of empowering others (activity), if he fully understands that part of being a disciple is freedom to grow and lead according to God's call on one's life (identity), or if there is simply a lack of anointing on the younger disciple for leadership (spirituality). For more on how wholistic discipleship can be used as a heuristic for spiritual vitality, see the appendices.

Potential Liabilities

While there are plenty of benefits to this approach toward discipleship, one can also intuit a few potential liabilities that are worth mentioning. As with any system that takes God's

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272. Similar results have been found in the literature, leading the authors of one study to conclude that "increasing [daily spiritual activities] may be another approach for reducing depressive symptoms, even in those who are less religious, adding to the clinician's armamentarium for addressing emotional problems in the medically ill."; Harold G. Koenig, Michelle J. Pearce, Bruce Nelson and Alaattin Erkanli, "Effects on Daily Spiritual Experiences of Religious Versus Conventional Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Depression," *Journal of Religion and Health*, October 2016, Vol. 55, No. 5 (October 2016), 1763-1777

ineffable words, his invisible church, and his cosmic mission and seeks to simplify and thereby understand them, there will inevitably be phenomena that are left unaddressed.[273] Nuance is the domain of metaphor and is usually lost when its meaning (or just *a* meaning) is systematized. Because that is a universal situation vexing any attempts like this thesis-project, they will mostly be ignored, assumed to be covered here, as a *caveat emptor* for pastors looking to bolt a simple system onto biblical obedience.

Having said that, there are at least two major problems that I see with my own system of wholistic discipleship that I must be aware of in order to be a more reflective practitioner. First, the program of wholistic discipleship presumes a rather modern, church-as-non-profit-business presupposition that other cultures may not find readily waiting in their imaginative framework. Thinking of a local church as an atomized organization that is meant to produce disciples would probably be alien to many of the writers of Scripture, who may prefer a metaphor of tribe or family. I could easily imagine re-working the whole system of thought around fewer charts and graphs and more stories of families that produce children, who are marked by a certain kind of spirit, all evidenced in certain actions. This intuition leads to a potential second liability, that of impersonality.

Because the church is like a family, one might find (indeed, I might find in a few years, but I rather hope not…) that the way wholistic discipleship is explained in this thesis-project produces thinner relationships more along the lines of coworkers than those of family members. While I hope that the inclusion of spiritual family as an irreducible part of disciple's

273. Throughout this thesis-project, my own intuition has told me at certain points, "That looks nice on the chart, but that doesn't capture reality at a deep enough level. Try again." And, when my intuitions didn't tell me this, my advisor did.

identity buttresses this liability, I cannot know how robust that will actually turn out to be without more research over time.

Matters for Further Study

Perhaps the stickiest aspect of this thesis-project is in the way I have chosen to discuss the spirituality domain. In the best-selling book, *Heaven is for Real* the main character, Colton, described many supposed visions of heaven. But, when he described the Holy Spirit, he simply said he was "bluish, but hard to see…" Lamentingly, Michael Horton responded, "'Bluish, but hard to see': That may be a fitting way of opening our exploration [into the Holy Spirit]."[274] Over the course of his book, Horton attempts to bring into focus an understanding of the Spirit across hundreds of pages that conclude with these words:

> As if flying in with string in his beak, the Holy Spirit is binding together things that otherwise fall apart. He is making saving connections. First, he binds eternity to time by uniting Christ to our humanity with its history of death, and then raising Jesus beyond death as the eschatological last Adam. Second, by uniting us to Christ he binds us to the Father as well as to the members of Christ's body and knits believers from all races and languages together more and more in fellowship…. Christian spirituality binds us to others: first to the Triune God through faith and then simultaneously to our neighbors through love.[275]

I agree with Horton—the Spirit is hard to see, yet he must be attended to. He is at once invisible, yet must be acknowledged and expected, especially in any system of making disciples. I believe that more study—both academic and experiential—of his power, presence, and positionality in the mission of the church is required to take some of the insights of this thesis-project and make them more broadly applicable and biblically faithful.

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274. Horton, *Holy Spirit,* 13.

275. Horton, *Holy Spirit,* 453, 456.

A Personal Reflection

Embarking upon this thesis-project was a task I took far too lightly. In the beginning, I simply wanted to study discipleship more fully and thereby implement a system more faithfully. What I neither expected nor desired was the degree to which this process of reframing, reimagining, and renewing my whole church—my life's work thus far—around wholistic discipleship would bring into excruciatingly clear view my own ongoing need for discipleship. In the future, another scholar should study the ways in which the pastorate is simply yet another course of "long obedience in the same direction" in the pastor's call to discipleship. Encouragingly, this multi-year thesis-project has helped highlight the gifts with which God has entrusted me. But that encouraging news has come with a detailed, well-researched, and multi-layered set of gaps in my leadership, and areas in which I am not personally as wholistically-integrated as I otherwise may have hoped.

The stated goal of Gordon-Conwell's Doctor of Ministry program is to create more passionate, reflective practitioners. I have never struggled to have passion for the ministry to which I have been called. But before this project I was not aware of the degree to which I lacked the tools for reflecting upon my ministry practices. Now that I have them, I see more clearly. And, in response to God's wounds of grace lovingly inflicted upon me by means of such reflection, I am now uncomfortably aware of the depth to which my identity in him, my activity for him, and my spiritual fellowship with him can and should connect. This has all been happening during the most challenging season of my personal life, as the eldest of my four children—my most important discipleship assignment—has spent almost the entire length of this thesis-project in a residential treatment facility for a constellation of mental health disorders. All

this has made clear to me the temptation of working hard for God to subtly replace knowing who I am in God.

At the time of this writing, my eldest child is preparing to come home. As her healing continues, I am filled with hope at the idea that the father to whom she returns is a more whole man—a human, more fully alive, whose identity, activity, and spirituality have been and continue to be integrated, by faith in the healing gospel. Truly, God's providence is ever at work. And, these reflections have only served to deepen my passion to make disciples, and create church structures and cultures that wholistically enable discipleship.

Conclusion

In this thesis-project, I have sought to demonstrate that wholistically integrating a disciple's activity, identity, and spirituality are essential to Great Commission and Great Commandment faithfulness, and how a church like mine can bring them together, fostering wholistic discipleship. By reflecting on my experience planting and leading Aletheia Church and interacting with pastoral and theological leaders within the broadly evangelical tradition of the previous few generations, I have concluded that a disciple is a human, fully alive and integrated in his identity, activity, and spirituality, and that discipleship is, therefore, the process by which this integration becomes possible. Laying out the (ongoing) process by which Aletheia Church first reframed, reimagined, and renewed its commitment to wholistic discipleship, I sincerely hope that I have made a contribution larger than the one to my own church. By profitably researching scripture, conversing with wise practitioners, and humbly reflecting on the journey thus far, it may just be the case that some of the wisdom contained within this thesis-project could bring life and depth to the work of other pastors and leaders who dream of the day when

the daily work of discipleship, fraught with all manner of challenges and victories, finally gives way to the longed for, “well done.”

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